The Development of Conflict Handling Skills *via* Outdoor Management Development: A Framework for Optimising the Process

Veronica Burke

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a learning systems-based model for the optimum development and transfer of conflict handling skills *via* Outdoor Management Development (OMD) programmes.

Despite a rapid increase in provision for OMD, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the efficacy of the learning process and transfer to the workplace. Existing research focuses primarily upon the outcomes of courses, rather then the means by which these outcomes may accrue. Accordingly, focusing on this context, the literature on cognitive skill acquisition was used to construct a new framework for analysing the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer. Using the skills of conflict handling as an example, the role of knowledge in skill acquisition was linked to the issue of learning transfer to propose a way in which different methodologies may influence learning outcomes.

However, whilst the initial aim was to empirically test this framework, a cursory consideration showed that a large number of factors had to be empirically confirmed before this could be accomplished. Thus in order to develop the framework and explore its' veracity in relation to management development provision, a mixed methods design involving both qualitative and quantitative and inductive and deductive approaches was utilised within the overall research strategy. The earlier stages of the fieldwork focused upon the nature of the conflict handling process and the characteristics of conflict in business contexts. This research provided a basis for investigations into the process of conflict regulation and the knowledge base underlying skills application. The final phase of the fieldwork focused upon the development of conflict handling skills, including perceived provision for conflict handling in OMD. Methods used were content analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire survey. A total of five studies were completed.

The framework was broadly supported by both providers' and clients' expectations of OMD, although there was little or no evidence for the application of this framework, or any other process based decision making, on the design of optimum content or method. Recommendations for future study revolve around the need to empirically test the efficacy of recommendations accruing from the framework.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

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Authors Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. It has not been submitted before for any degree of examination in any other University.

28TH day of MAY 2002

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Outdoor Management Development

Since the establishment of the first Outward Bound School in 1941, there has been an expansion in the use of the outdoors as a vehicle for managerial learning. Increasingly, programmes are being offered to increase personal contribution and effectiveness at work. As a medium for personal development, the outdoors offers many opportunities as it has the potential to engage individuals in physical, emotional and intellectual experiences. Thus, through the process of participating in outdoor activities and reviewing these activities it is suggested that managers are offered a powerful arena in which to reflect on their own responses to change, ambiguity and perceived risk - factors which are very common in organisational life (Lucas, 1992). Mossman (1983) uses the label "outdoor management development" (OMD) to describe programmes which utilise outdoor adventure activities to foster the professional development of corporate managers, and Bank (1994) has offered a further classification of this category as follows:

"adventure training", which emphasises physical aspects to enhance personal growth

and

"development training", which uses constant analysis of experiences for specific purposes

Within this thesis, the kind of outdoor development of interest is that with the objective of promoting personal development. This type is clearly classified within the latter of Bank's two categories.

There is a reasonable body of anecdotal evidence to suggest that the outdoors produces many of the outcomes which it claims (Barlow, 1989; Doyle, 1989; Hall,

1989; Hogg, 1989; Arkin, 1996), which include enhanced self awareness and the development of a variety of personal skills and qualities. Despite this growth in application and a commensurate growth in provision however, there has been little systematic theorising in the area and few empirical studies to support claims related to either the nature of the development process itself or its transfer to the workplace. Most contemporary studies show a strong accent on the behavioural effects of courses and are therefore concerned with measuring outcomes. However, comparatively little work has focused on the *means* by which personal development activities promote learning or indeed, and more crucially in a commercial sense, how this learning is transferred to the workplace. Accordingly, this thesis offers a new way of evaluating the learning and transfer of management skills *via* OMD. Building on the literature of cognitive skill acquisition, a framework for analysing the learning of managerial skills through the medium of OMD is proposed. Additional advantages of such a framework relate to the transfer of such skills and clarification of the circumstances under which transfer is more likely to occur. To exemplify this process, the discussion will consider the development of skills related to conflict handling, a factor shown to be an important feature of effective management (Beer & Walton, 1990). In exploring this issue, the thesis will consider three key components of conflict handling. Firstly, the nature of conflict handling will be explored. Secondly, there is a focus upon the process through which conflict levels are optimised and finally, the development of conflict handling skills is considered, including provision for skills learning and transfer in the domain of OMD.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Research Programme

The overall aim of this study is to develop a framework for analysing the learning and transfer of a specific category of management skills (namely conflict handling) *via* OMD. This aim, in turn comprises the following six objectives, subsequently addressed through the five empirical studies which form the bulk of the thesis.

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT HANDLING

1. To identify the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work and to establish whether these are specific or generic in their application **(Study 1; Study 2)**.

2. To establish categories of conflict based on managers' experience in business and to compare these categories with those proposed in the literature **(Study 3, objective 2)**.

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT REGULATION

3. To determine the knowledge base (and any underlying factors) influencing managers' decisions in handling conflict **(Study 3, objective 1)**.

4. To specify the perceived sources of the skills utilised by managers to deal with conflict at work **(Study 3, objective 3)**.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS IN CONFLICT HANDLING

5. To solicit clients and provider's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD **(Study 4, objectives 1 and 2; Study 5, objective 1).**

6. To identify perceived approaches to learning transfer employed by OMD providers (**Study 4, objective 3; Study 5, objective 2)**.

1.3 The Structure of the Thesis

In order to address these research objectives, a review of existing literature in OMD and conflict management is used to identify directions for research. Thereafter, identified "gaps" in these topics enable the application of theories related to cognitive skill acquisition in order to produce a framework for analysing the mechanisms of skills learning in OMD.

Accordingly, Chapter Two reviews existing literature in OMD and develops the area of skill acquisition and transfer as a legitimate, original and appropriate area for

research. Chapters Three and Four introduce the process of conflict management and show how conflict handling skills are fundamental to managerial work. Subsequent discussion also demonstrates how the development of conflict handling skills may accrue as one of the outcomes of OMD. These chapters draw on the literature related to cognitive skill acquisition to highlight the lack of evaluative frameworks in OMD for the promotion of skills learning and transfer. These tasks are carried out predominantly through a review of relevant work, with existing research utilised where appropriate. Chapter Five summarises the literature review and presents a new (theoretically derived) framework for analysing the learning and transfer of cognitive skills *via* OMD. Thereafter, a methodological position derived from the procedures and techniques of grounded theory is adopted (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and subsequently the development of an appropriate research design to address the stated objectives is justified. Chapters Six to Ten have an empirical focus and present the research findings in relation to the three main phases of investigation. Thus the earlier stages of the fieldwork focus upon the nature of the conflict handling process and the characteristics of conflict in business contexts. This research provides a basis for investigations into the process of conflict regulation and the knowledge base underlying skills application. Subsequently, the final phase of the fieldwork focuses upon the development of conflict handling skills, including perceived provision for conflict handling in OMD. The overall conclusions are presented in Chapter Eleven and there is an evaluation of the theory developed in earlier chapters to allow for an assessment of the applicability of the framework to OMD. This analysis enables reflections on the research to be made and future directions to be identified. The resultant research design that has been adopted within the study can be seen in Figure 1.1 below.

RESEARCH PHASE	OBJECTIVE (see 1-6 above)	CONTENT	CHAPTER
Establishing a Framework		Literature review Research Methods	2-4 5
Nature of conflict handling	Objectives 1 & 2	Study 1 (content analysis) Study 2 (interviews) Study 3 (interviews)	6 7 8
The process of conflict regulation	Objectives 3 & 4	Study 3	8
The development of conflict handling skills	Objectives 4 & 5	Study 4 (interviews) Study 5 (questionnaire) Discussion and conclusion	9 10 11

Figure 1.1 Outline of the thesis progression

Chapter Two

Identifying an Agenda for Studying the Processes of Outdoor Management Development Provision

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify an agenda for studying the processes of outdoor management development provision. It is divided into sections which explore the use of the outdoors for manager development, the proposed benefits of OMD, and existing empirical research. The discussion also highlights the learning of managerial skills as an appropriate area for investigating the processes of OMD.

2.2 Definitions

The terms management development, management training and management education are often used interchangeably (Drew Smith *et al.*, 1989; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986), with consequent confusion for clients and providers alike. Burgoyne & Stuart (1978) agree on the following distinction between these:

a) *Management training* is the process by which managers acquire the knowledge and skills related to their work by formal or structured means
b) *Management education* is formal and structured, taking place within an institutional framework
c) *Management development* is concerned with developing the individual and involves the contribution of formal and informal experience.

Indeed, although "management development" often refers to a firm's strategic plan for the development of its managerial talent, the term as discussed in this thesis is examined in the context of the development of individuals as they experience the effects of personal development activities in the outdoors - rather than management development as a strategic or organisational concern *per se*.

2.3 The History of Outdoor Management Development

To justify an agenda for studying the processes of OMD, it is useful to begin with a summary of the literature on the outdoors and management learning. Despite substantial growth in the last twenty years, the industry of OMD has received relatively little research attention, although strong anecdotal support for this type of management learning has been expressed many times. The literature on the topic reveals weak empirical foundations for assessing efficacy of provision and a general lack of information about which types of courses work best to achieve particular learning objectives. It is against this background that the discussion will consider the history of OMD, in order to highlight some of the problems and issues associated with this sector of the management training market.

The surge of interest in management education, training and development has been a phenomenon of the late 1980's and early 1990's. It had also been a subject of national debate in the U.K. in earlier post war periods, but the interest was spasmodic and commitment to it fragile (Drew-Smith et. al., 1989). However, changes in international competition and other economic factors led to renewed interest in management development and, in the 1990's, personal development activities were incorporated into many management development programmes. "Personal development activities" can be defined as those which specifically aim to enhance individuals' insight into their own motivations, values, behaviours and attitudes. In addition to gaining insight into themselves, personal development activities aim to help people develop latent abilities, change unhelpful behaviours and increase their overall effectiveness. The assumed outcomes of these activities, such as improved self awareness, enhanced abilities to deal with ambiguity and change, and improved interpersonal skills, have all been identified as necessary personal qualities for the effective manager in the current environment.

Among the vehicles used for personal development, the use of the outdoors for this purpose has increasingly received attention as a beneficial method (Bank, 1994). As noted in the introduction, the use of the outdoors for management development has its roots in the establishment of Outward Bound. Outward Bound was started in the

1940's in Aberdovey, Wales, to prepare young people for the merchant marine (Carioppe & Adamson, 1988). There are 34 Outward Bound Schools in 17 countries today and they have exerted a long-term influence on the outdoor development industry (Wilson, 1991). The American Outward Bound schools have led the way in outdoor development in conjunction with business schools, universities and private organisations such as the Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina. Indeed, outdoor pursuits in one form or another features as a part of many organisational training and development activities throughout the world (Donnan, 1985). The types of activities offered are diverse and include wilderness programmes, adventure education, outdoor pursuits and expedition training. Both the United World Colleges in North America offer an outdoor programme and in British Columbia, the Lester B. Pearson United World College has linked its programmes with the local community, becoming a recognised centre for land search and rescue. In addition, many hundreds of international schools now offer outdoor pursuits in some form, including activities such as canoeing, mountaineering, and aquatic sports and the use of these activities for manager development is now commonplace throughout the U.S.A. and Australia. In the U.K., at least 35 commercial companies and educational trusts now use the outdoors for management development and big name organisations such as Microsoft, Eagle Star Life and Kodak are estimated to be spending 550 million pounds a year sending staff on courses (McGrory, 1998). Thus, managers from diverse sectors of industry have participated in a plethora of physical challenges such as bridge building exercises, abseiling, climbing and overnight expeditions, all in the belief that these experiences will improve their work performance. Lucas (1992, p. 25) offers an interesting interpretation of the way in which the outdoors has moved into the arena of management development:

> One of the most endearing qualities of the British is their eccentric tendency to row boats across oceans, climb impossible mountains, and so on... It is not surprising therefore, that a small but thriving industry has grown up around the development of executives through confrontation with nature. Many of these enterprises are directed by ex-military men, especially members of the SAS. I am not clear what kinds of executives are being sent and by what kinds of sponsors ...Nonetheless, the back-to-nature movement has to be seen in context as part of a shift to education and development based on experience, and is important for that.

Indeed, it is arguable that for some, the use of the outdoors for management development still conjures up images of SAS style training. Articles in the popular press titled: "True Grit" (Barlow, 1989), "No Place to Go" (Hall, 1989) and "Managers take to the Hills" (Darwent, 1990) signal the rapid expansion of outdoor development in the management development industry but also the still prevalent perception that it resembles military style manoeuvres. However, this view appears to be changing as more information about the nature of outdoor development has become available and guides to the variety of providers act as a basis for potential clients (Outdoor Development User's Trust, 1991).

2.4 The Design of Outdoor Management Development Programmes

The traditional methods of imparting knowledge through lectures, discussions and case studies have formed a part of management development for decades but as a vehicle for personal development, the outdoors offers a powerful arena for learning because it uses outdoor experiences to prompt individuals through the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1971). This idea is represented in Figure 2.1 below:

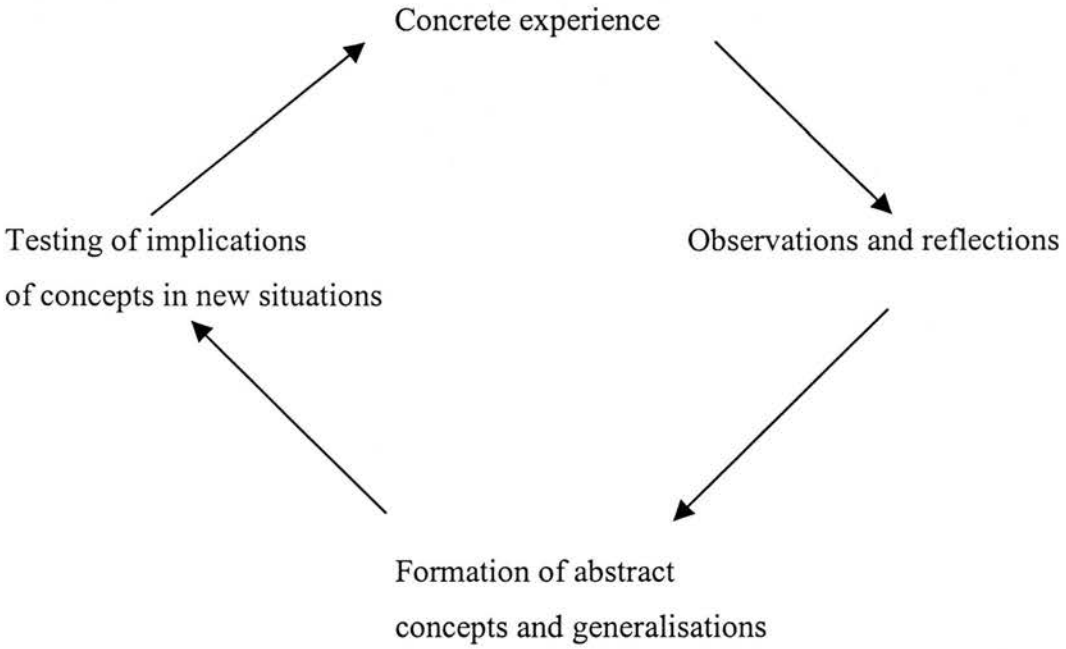


Figure 2.1 The circular learning pattern

From "Organisational psychology - a book of readings" by D.A. Kolb, I.M. Rubin and J. McIntyre, 1979, p. 20.

Indeed, experiential learning has been described as a vital component of management development activities:

> It is a process which begins with the experience, followed by reflection, discussion, analysis and evaluation of the experience. The assumption is that we seldom learn from experience unless we assess the experience, assigning our own meaning in terms of our own goals, aims, ambitions and expectations. (Bank, 1994, p.7)

Mumford (1987) is a key proponent of experiential approaches within management development. Among his writings on the area is the proposition that

> Instead of giving emphasis to the provision of knowledge and asking managers to interpret and use knowledge in subsequent action - it would be more appropriate and more likely to be successful if we give prime attention to issues of action and secondary attention to issues of the required knowledge (p. 24)

He is not alone in his views. Kolb, Rubin & McIntyre (1984), Boydell & Pedler (1981) and Mumford (1987) all support the notion of managers taking part in their own learning and it is precisely such an approach that underpins the use of the outdoors for management development.

However, it is arguable that more has been written about the design of outdoor development programmes than the rationale underpinning their use. Indeed, one of the predominant themes in design issues is the extent to which learning generated from the outdoors can be transferred to the workplace. In a similar vein, Kirk (1986) has suggested that the issue of learning transfer is of particular importance to outdoor development programmes because the outdoor environment is so unlike that of the indoor work setting, and consequently the links to work scenarios must be made carefully. However, the literature reveals a profound lack of information about how OMD programmes promote transfer of learning and consequently, about which designs are appropriate to achieve particular objectives. Thus, the evidence suggests that the link between course design and effective transfer of learning remains unexplored. This crucial issue will be discussed in more depth in Chapters Four and Five.

In addressing the design of OMD programmes, Cacioppe and Adamson (1988, p. 79) offer a four stage model:

1. A problem / challenge is presented with specific resources, constraints and timings.

2. Delegates attempt to solve the problems using accumulated experience, knowledge and combined abilities of group.

3. The task is reviewed through a process of feedback, analysis and reflection

4. Concepts, ideas and procedures are formulated and generalisations are made that help solve future problems.

These principles form the basis for many outdoor development programme designs and highlight the two key elements in such courses - namely the outdoor task and the review process. However, the linkage between these components and the learning transfer process is still unclear.

In exploring the outdoor task component, it is apparent that one of the distinctive hallmarks of outdoor development type activities is that they take place outside of the managers' "normal" sphere of experience. Thus, the outdoor tasks may often appear unfamiliar and risky to participants. Indeed, some writers have suggested that it is these characteristics that make the learning process so powerful (Bank, 1994; Mossman, 1983); as one client commented:

> Being able to climb a tree and walk on a wire 25ft above the ground did not actually help them to run the business more effectively, but it did create the trust between them that enabled them to discuss why they had withheld information from each other in the business. This trust has survived the programme - at least so far. (Arkin, 1996, p. 46)

A great variety of tasks can be included in OMD programmes. These range from individually based activities such as abseiling or canoeing, to team based tasks such as mountain rescue or problem solving exercises. Dainty and Lucas (1992) offer a framework whereby tasks can be classified, ranging along a continuum from tightly defined to loosely defined. Tightly defined tasks are those with narrow objectives, high structure and high technical input, such as climbing or canoeing. At the other end of the continuum are the activities with broad objectives, unstructured tasks and low requirements for technical support (for example, a night time problem solving exercise). Dainty and Lucas suggest that the type of task (tight or loose) combined with the type of review process style may deliver varying outcomes, but these ideas remain to be empirically tested. Once again, these vague statements represent the best efforts within the literature at a rationale or philosophy for the optimum design of OMD.

The second key design element is the review process. It has been hypothesised that most of the learning in OMD programmes happens as a result of the review sessions (Krouwel, 1980). This process may be handled in a variety of ways, ranging from large group discussions to one-on-one feedback, with the reviews usually taking place after the outdoor tasks. Once again, in their framework Dainty and Lucas identify two varieties, namely high and low intensity reviews. In those with low intensity, personal feedback is not encouraged or fostered and the issues arising from the outdoor tasks are viewed in general terms and unrelated to individual behaviour. However, in those with high intensity, delegates are encouraged to give and receive feedback on their own behaviour, to explore the feelings of members of the group in a constructive way and to be direct, challenging and confrontational with one another. Again however, although we know something of the types of activities used in OMD and the nature of the subsequent reviews, there is a lack of empirical work to support the efficacy of these learning mechanisms and it is this area that the thesis aims to address.

2.5 The Proposed Benefits of Outdoor Management Development

Despite the expansion in the use of the outdoors for manager development, it is misleading to talk about this provision as if it were generic. Indeed, as the previous section has shown, programmes vary greatly in key components such as the tasks they use, the nature of the review processes and the extent of tutor involvement. Most importantly, they differ in their stated objectives. At one level, courses may provide for the simple aim of getting a group of people to know one another better (by emphasising teamwork or group cohesion) but, on a more ambitious plane, it has been claimed that the outdoor medium facilitates significant personal experiences which can transform unhelpful managerial behaviours or practices. Unfortunately however, no link, theoretical or empirical, relates these objectives to particular methodologies or course designs.

In the domain of OMD, the literature generated by providers (Lucas, 1992) reveals two broad categories of learning outcomes. The first category is concerned with individual's personal growth, such as improved skills or awareness whilst the second category focuses upon outcomes aimed at group development, such as enhanced group effectiveness or leadership. This thesis focuses on the first of these two categories i.e. programmes designed to enhance managers' personal growth. The literature offers a further classification of this category as follows:

(1) Programmes aimed at developing the managers' self-confidence by exposing them to outdoor activities which involve elements of perceived or actual risk.
(2) Programmes which focus on the development of personal effectiveness and self awareness by using a review process to link outdoor experiences with learning.

The thesis focuses on the second of these two categories - programmes aimed at increasing self- awareness and personal effectiveness.

From an anecdotal perspective, there are many examples in the literature of enthusiastic testimonials to the benefits of the outdoors. A vast majority of these

accounts are located in newspapers and popular magazines as opposed to research publications. One interesting aspect common to the narrative provided by these authors is the amount of positive statements regarding both the group and individual benefits of OMD programmes. One executive said: "When we left the mountain, it looked unchanged: no difference. None of us could say the same about each other" (Bank 1994, p. 49).

In 1993, Conger wrote

> I peer over the edge of the cliff, trying to be logical. The harness to which I am attached seems sturdy. I have just watched several other participants jump. Although they appeared anxious at first, they not only survived the leap - they seemed to enjoy it. I also trust the safety of the system because I trust the training company does not want me to die. Okay, given that assessment, let's take the risk. It might even be fun. And somehow, I might become a better leader. So off the edge I go. (p. 25 & 26).

In a similar vein, Darwent writes

> Take your deskbound executive out of his mileu, set him or her an unfamiliar challenge, and he or she will emerge refreshed, confident and mind-duly expanded. There is no particular magic in the outdoors per se, but it does allow trainers to isolate certain management activities and thus assist learning. (1990, p. 25).

In a description of her experiences while attending the Colorado Outward Bound Corporate Development Program, Long (1984, p. 64) states:

> Not only were we taking time for process analysis with the aid of straightforward graphic examples, but since the different exercises highlighted a wide range of talents and physical abilities, we soon came to respect the ideas and contributions of others and the interdependence of our team.

In another account presented by Cox (1982, p. 1) the author comments:

> I knew inside me that I'd done more than simply climb a mountain. My companion looked at me a moment and then he said, "You see what I mean, now. Climb a mountain on Sunday and nothing on your desk on Monday is impossible".

In addition, Bank (1994, p. 46) presents numerous quotes form participants on OMD courses throughout the U. K.. A sample of these statements follows:

> I can now throw myself off a cliff without worrying about it.
>
> It increased my confidence in my own ability and in an organised group's ability to meet different, fresh challenges and succeed.
>
> Vital experiences of the causes of organisational cock-ups in microcosm.
>
> A learning experience in how to handle unusual situations, how group behaviour differs in practical areas as against classroom discussions - how to look at problems with an open mind as opposed to having fixed ideas.

In a similar vein, an MBA student at Cranfield School of Management said:

> For the first time, we as a group ceased to be analytical observers and became operatives. It thus became possible notably to explore the impact on other people of your decisions, but also to identify your own reaction to other people's decisions. As this was done in a demanding environment, the decision made had a direct and sometimes painful impact upon you. Hence, it made me realise the extent of the power of the decision maker and how callous it can become if he fails to appreciate the effects his decision will have on the operatives. It "humanised" the classroom theories. (Bank, 1994, p. 45)

The rationale for using the outdoors is supported in part by all these statements but, on its own, exposing managers to risk-laden outdoor activities will not necessarily result in relevant learning. Although many participants return from courses with an enthusiasm for the experience, they struggle to articulate what it is that they have learned (Lucas, 1992). Arguably, many programmes fail to make the crucial link between the outdoor tasks and focused learning, and this may be one reason why there is some confusion amongst managers and trainers about the philosophy underlying the outdoor approach. Indeed, it is possible to detect a degree of uncertainty about what OMD could (and should) achieve for its clients. For example, one manager reflecting on his experiences said: "Outdoor activities can be the ultimate in team building, but what can they offer the individual manager, other than heart failure?" (Schofield, 1997, p. 9)

Undoubtedly, some would argue, the value of outdoor management development lies in the perceived experience of companies who regularly use this method and in testimonials from those directly involved in the experience. Indeed, supportive comments are commonly reported but is this sufficient to justify its use? Crucially, where there are attempts beyond anecdotal evidence, the analyses are rarely more than correlational (Hattie, Marsh, Neil & Richards, 1997) and, although these studies have gone some way to develop our awareness of the possible processes which underlie OMD, genuine demonstration of OMD's method and consequent effectiveness must surely be based on rigorous empirical investigation. In this respect, research into the efficacy of OMD in the U.K. and abroad is still at an embryonic stage. In 1991, Sakofs, commenting on the 1990 International Association for Experiential Education Conference said:

> Throughout these meetings and subsequent discussions it became clear that there is a need for more and better research in the field of experiential education, which in turn, is defined by a need to better understand the efficacy of specific experiential techniques and programmes. (p. 24)

In attempting to explore the linkage between programme characteristics and learning outcomes, Chapman and Lumsden (1983) used Waters (1980) classification of "insight skills", which comprise working in groups, coping with ambiguity and change, building trust and negotiating. This particular approach emphasises the importance of participants gaining insight into the consequences of particular attitudes or behaviours. They maintain that: "At the best, the task comprising (our) programme has been designed to highlight specific management or organisational issues and provide the participant with an opportunity to practice appropriate managerial skills" (Chapman & Lumsden, 1983 p. 13).

Similarly, Bank (1994 p. 9) highlights the benefits of outdoor programmes in terms of insight skills and goes so far as to say that this area is the most relevant and pertinent to OMD. Similarly, Dainty and Lucas (1992) agree that skills improvement is a crucial area and one of the main potential outcomes of OMD activities. However, although it is apparent that some OMD programmes emphasise the importance of insight skills whilst others utilise behavioural practice to enhance skills deployment,

the relationship between these methodologies and skilled business performance is not explored in the literature.

As this section has shown, despite the plethora of anecdotal evidence to support the use of the outdoors for management development (Darwent, 1990; Long, 1984; Cox & Putnam, 1982) and the variety of methodologies that are utilised, there are, as yet, no theoretical frameworks offered in the literature concerning OMD. Although the majority of the OMD literature originated in Britain (Galpin, 1989), the outcomes promised by OMD in the U.K. and elsewhere, are now as varied as the companies who deliver them and range from a cure for burnout to enhancing interpersonal skills. However, Dainty and Lucas (1992) have claimed that the outdoor medium is frequently misunderstood because there is a lack of critical articles in the field, little research in the area and (interestingly for this thesis) an absence of evaluative frameworks for outdoor development. Indeed, the evidence suggests that evaluating the outdoor medium has proved to be a difficult task as the reactions it creates can be powerful and complex. Nonetheless, as Bank comments:

> It would be wrong for the researcher to throw up his hands and despair of evaluating something as complex as an outdoor development programme. Simple, crude and even inaccurate measurements can provide insights into complex relations which stimulate fresh development of the training process. (1994, p. 81)

Even as long ago as 1987, providers of outdoor development were acknowledging the need for evaluation. A report from the Development Training Advisory Group, produced as a result of a major national conference, concluded that the evaluation process should take place throughout a course, with ongoing feedback about how it is helping participants. The report also pointed to the importance of a clear follow-up procedure to identify the learning outcomes that have been achieved. Several references were made to the lack of empirical work concerning the outcomes of courses and thus, there was agreement that more research was needed (Everard 1987, p. 83). However, despite this concern, there are, as yet, no theoretically derived measures of efficacy. In addition, there is still insufficient evidence to link particular course designs with specific learning outcomes, both in terms of the skills acquired,

and their transfer to business settings. Clearly, the need remains for more information about how OMD programmes achieve their objectives and why some courses are more successful than others.

Thus, at its most practical level, OMD is an important area of research because many management trainers are using the outdoors without empirical evidence for their methodologies. On a more theoretical level, the effectiveness or not of this particular training medium has important implications for management learning on a broader scale. Accordingly, the next section will review the empirical evidence that has been gathered to date in the domain of OMD.

2.6 Research in Outdoor Management Development

Despite the limitations described above, there have been some attempts to measure the benefits of outdoor programmes. Unfortunately, these have often failed to support the changes to management *skills* which are crucially claimed by providers (Burke & Collins, 1998). One such study, conducted over twenty years ago into the "character-building" aspects of British outdoor development courses for youths, concluded that

> ...although the characters of trainees may be modified, their behaviours and attitudes at work and leisure are more rarely affected (by outdoor development). The courses' effects upon trainees' characters can ripple outwards to influence their social behaviour, but there are few indications of the main types of social change that organisers and sponsors seek. (Roberts, White & Parker, 1974, p. 149).

Another project, carried out in 1977, assessed the benefits of an executive Outward Bound course. Forty four members of The London Business School attended a programme at The Mountain School in Eskdale and 43 out of the 44 participants filled out a three page questionnaire evaluating the experience. Of the 43 men, 30 found the course relevant to the London Executive Programme, 36 felt the module should be included in the next programme, 6 said it should not and one respondent was uncertain (Bank, 1994, p. 43). Similarly, questionnaires administered during a five day course at the same Outward Bound School five years later in the autumn of 1982 for part-time MBA students at Cranfield School of Management also showed

positive results. Twenty two out of thirty five members on the course volunteered to attend and 20 questionnaires were returned. All but one of the respondents found the course "personally valuable" and everyone felt it should become a regular feature of the MBA course.

In 1987, Richard Marshall researched the area of outdoor management development and concluded his thesis with the question: "Does outdoor management development work?" (p. 49). However, despite the common sense appeal of this approach, perhaps the crucial question should be: "*How* does outdoor management development work?" Indeed, this question highlights the need for greater understanding about the mechanisms of effective learning in OMD and it is precisely this area that the thesis aims to address.

In an interesting study for its time, Drebing, Willis and Genet (1987) examined the effects of anxiety on outdoor learning events. Thirty-nine incoming freshmen at Wheaton College in the U.S.A. were administered the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg & Jacobs, 1977). After the course, all subjects completed a questionnaire which examined various aspects of the course. The results of the study indicated that the more anxious the student, the less satisfied they were with the experience. In addition, these data showed that during the programme, students with both high and low levels of anxiety found it harder to understand their experience than those students with a moderate level of anxiety. Furthermore, the results indicated that the students with the highest anxiety reported having a more significant relationship with the leaders than did others, whilst previous experience in the outdoors was related to lower levels of anxiety at the outset. For the present study, the number and complexity of different factors point to the lack of clearly articulated theory for how the outdoor process works, and why some courses are perceived to be more efficacious than others. In extending this contention, Wichman (1983) has also emphasised the dearth of empirical scrutiny in this area and suggests that we need more information to establish how and why adventure programmes work.

In one of the first doctoral studies on the subject, Timothy Galpin (1989) examined the effects of a three day outdoor management development course on participants. For this research, a quasi experimental design was used in which two surveys were administered at four testing periods - one month prior to the course, at the beginning of the course and at the end, and one month after the course had finished. The data analyses led to the following conclusions: 1) participation in the OMD programme had a positive impact on participant self concept and hardiness, 2) the programme had a greater effect on self concept and hardiness than on trust of others and involvement in group processes, 3) the positive effects on self concept and hardiness were much greater for female participants than for male, and for older participants than for younger participants. In addition, the changes in self concept and hardiness were maintained for at least four weeks following the OMD programme and were sustained to a greater extent by the female managers than the male. In a study such as this, the emphasis on the outcomes of OMD is interesting, but once again these data do not tell us much about the underlying mechanisms of learning or indeed, the methodology adopted in respect of learning transfer.

With respect to the company consumer's perspective of OMD, Dendle (1989) surveyed managers, providers and government agencies. Ninety five companies replied to the questionnaire and of the benefits of outdoor development, the top three chosen were personal development, team development and leadership development. However, one of the key recommendations from the study was that there should be more research into <u>how</u> learning generated from the outdoor experience gets transferred to the workplace. Indeed, when managers do return to work after the experience, they are often under pressure to behave as they did before receiving the training and thus, any learning that has occurred is not reinforced because of insufficient support. Indeed, as the literature reveals, there is a distinct lack of information about how particular course designs or methodologies promote transfer of learning and, this is somewhat surprising, since the issue is arguably the key to determining the effectiveness of OMD (Lucas, 1992). Nonetheless, as Nixon (1981) comments, measuring the impact of skills based training is very difficult because of two main reasons:

- Insufficient organisational structures to support change

- Learning events have concentrated on the development of knowledge and skills and because of this, not enough attention has been given to working with managers on the internal blocks which stop them from making changes in their behaviour. Attitudes, lack of confidence or energy are the real blocks to changing (p. xv).

Indeed, such issues represent an important concern for supporters of OMD, not least because of the current lack of empirical evidence to support the design of courses. This point is supported by Bhogal (1988, p. 110) who comments

> Ironically the biggest challenge facing delegates is applying to their own jobs all the principles learned. The whole issue of the transfer of learning from this very alien environment to the workplace is one which is at the root of many of the arguments over the value of outdoor learning.

Further support for the call for more objective examination came from Buller, Cragun and McEvoy in 1991, who concluded that: "Virtually no rigorous, empirical evidence exists regarding the effects of outdoor training programmes. Yet an increasing number of organisations are sending executives and managers to outdoor programmes" (p. 58). Thus, even at this time, there was a lack of information to provide a basis for serious evaluation. In 1992, Bronson and his colleagues evaluated changes in stages of team development before and after involvement with a corporate adventure training event. An experimental group of managers were subjected to an OMD programme while a control group from the same company did not receive the training. Overall, no changes in the control group, coupled with increases in the experimental group suggested that improved team development did occur for this intact work unit. However, generalisation of the findings beyond this particular programme was not recommended by the researchers because of limitations in the chosen research methodology. Although the results suggested that positive effects did occur, no claims were made to the extent of this transfer or to its lasting effect

beyond the two month period studied. The conclusion was that more research was needed.

The first substantial study in this country which tried to measure the impact of outdoor development on managers was completed by Donna Lucas in 1992 at Cranfield School of Management. She studied a sample of 35 MBA students taking an outdoor module as part of their programme. Data were collected from participants before the course, immediately afterwards and six months later. Responses were compared with a control group who chose not to attend the outdoor module (although once again, there were potential problems with such a selection). Different methods of collecting data were used, including semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The main findings supported the value of outdoor development for personal development. It was found that people with low self-awareness experienced an improvement in self esteem through the outdoor experience. In addition, individuals who registered the highest impact from outdoor events were not as cognitively "complex" as those who registered lower impact. This finding could have implications for the selection of course participants as companies may want to choose people who are most likely to benefit from the experience. However, even in such a comprehensive study, many of the hypotheses were not clearly supported by the data (Bank, 1994) and, given the complexity of the area, it is not surprising that our understanding of OMD is still at a tentative stage.

In examining the effects of OMD on participants, Dainty and Lucas (1992) suggested that the more effective the outdoor programme, the closer the individual is moved towards attaining self esteem. They concluded that effective outdoor learning events for managers must embrace what is called "high intensity processing" (i.e. broad skills) and "self and other awareness" and they argue strongly for an updating of the importance of these outcomes in outdoor programmes. Once again, the need for a theoretical framework of the linkage between activity and outcome seems apparent.

In 1995, a second U.K. doctoral thesis focused upon the experiences of managers attending residential outdoor development courses at the Brathay Hall Trust in

Cumbria (Greenaway, 1995). The main purpose of the research was to discover the variety of learning and development events valued by managers whilst also looking for patterns common to all (or most of) these experiences. The methodology included questionnaires and follow-up interviews with managers and course tutors. The main findings revealed that significant development was not necessarily accompanied by emotional turbulence and key learning experiences tended to happen more by accident than by design. In addition, these experiences seemed to result from a combination of general factors such as positive attitudes towards learning, high levels of involvement and responsibility, a varied and eventful programme and strong support for group risk taking. An additional unsolicited finding revealed that the tutor's perspectives differed significantly from those of the participants. These results may have important implications for the methodologies employed to examine the mechanisms of learning *via* OMD, since the reality of what is learned will rest with the participants rather than with the course provider (*c.f.* Eliot & Wexler, 1994). It may therefore be beneficial to focus upon managers' experiences of programmes at the same time as analysing the processes of course design. This procedure would enable potential outcomes to be assessed for their consistency against client's own accounts of the learning that has been achieved. In addition, although the emphasis on processes rather than outcomes in the Greenaway study represents an important "shift" in OMD research, the link between course design and focused learning seems to have received comparatively little attention within the overall research strategy. Indeed, the adopted qualitative methodology, whilst rendering rich data about the case in question, may restrict the applicability of the results to the wider domain of OMD and, as such, represented an interesting pilot which failed to follow through on the factors highlighted. Crucially, Greenaway's work did not appear to address the important issue of the underlying rationale for the adoption of one methodology over another. Consequentially, there is still a lack of information about <u>why</u> certain courses are perceived to be more successful that others. Nonetheless, the research clearly underlined the need for a focus upon the experiences of managers in order to uncover the reasons why some participants seem to gain more from courses than others. At the present time, however, the philosophy underpinning the use of the outdoors for management development is far from clear. Essentially, this state of

affairs means that the "picture" we currently have of OMD lacks coherence and crucially, a clearly articulated rationale to inform the design and implementation of courses.

In 1997, Hattie *et al.* examined the effects of adventure programmes on a diverse array of outcomes such as self-concept, locus of control and leadership. They concluded that "the effect sizes varied substantially according to the particular programme and outcome and improved as the length of the programme and the ages increased. Too little is known, however, about why adventure programmes work effectively" (p. 43). In extending this contention, they concede that most of the studies to date, including their own meta-analysis, concentrate upon the summative rather than the formative or process aspects of adventure programmes. They surmise that it is critical that such formative studies are part of research procedures which investigate theoretical concerns that lead to positive changes:

> The insights provided by this meta analysis can assist in promoting an awareness that sound evaluative research is among the most promising routes to finding answers to the key questions about the processes that are most successful in adventure programmes. The questions that need to be asked by the adventure education promoters and the research procedures which need to be adopted are not dissimilar to those which the broader education scene has now been grappling with for some decades. The promise is there; it is now time for adventure educators to meet the challenge (Hattie, *et al.*, 1997 p. 78).

In concluding this brief review of the literature, it can be seen that much of the research to date has involved data-based "matching" of programme objectives against the outcomes of courses. However, although these investigations have gone some way to develop our understanding of the outcomes of OMD, much more empirical investigation is needed to clarify the mechanisms of learning (i.e. the processes through which OMD effects change) and consequentially the ways in which programmes might maximise the chances of this learning being transferred to the workplace. Accordingly, this thesis contributes to management development practice by focusing on the mechanisms and processes of OMD, rather than the outcomes.

The final section of this chapter will establish the development of managerial skills as a potential outcome of outdoor learning events. This discussion will also provide a foundation for Chapter Three which will identify conflict handling skills as the focus for evaluating the mechanisms of learning in OMD.

2.7 Identifying The Development of Managerial Skills as a potential outcome of Outdoor Management Development Programmes

As the previous section has shown, OMD has promised a wide variety of benefits. Indeed, given the rapid expansion in provision, it is worth asking questions about what these programmes expect to achieve and crucially, how the outdoor experience is linked to relevant and transferable learning. This section will identify some of the outcomes most influenced by OMD events and establish the development of managerial skills as a legitimate area for further investigating the processes and mechanisms of learning.

During the 1970's there was a growing interest in the impact of outdoor development programmes on self awareness and self concept, and there were many attempts at what Kimball (1979) termed "soft" forms of evaluation, such as narrative accounts and case studies. The evidence for enhanced self concept was generally supportive (Ewert, 1983), although there was little evidence that these approaches took account of the advances that were being made at the time in self-concept theory and measurement (Shalveston, Hubner & Stanton, 1976). Since this time, as the previous section has shown, there have been various attempts to look at outcomes using "before and after" comparison and, in the climate created by such studies, a wide variety of potential benefits have been identified.

Amongst the many areas of management learning that may be addressed by OMD, the domain of skills development has been suggested as the most relevant:

> Managers apply their skills to a range of tasks which are quite different to those they face at work but which are challenging and real. The results of their action are immediately apparent, providing clear evidence of their performance and a basis for feedback, questioning and experiment. Although the outdoor tasks are not *normal*, they are inescapably *real*. Managing an

> outdoor situation is like managing life. It is full of unpredictable events and people, a result has to be achieved and there are only limited resources and time available. Because the tasks are so different from the work situation, the underlying management processes are laid bare. (Creswick & Williams, 1979, p. 3)

In common with this approach, Foy (1981, p. 218) has commented: "The contribution of management development that is most important is the pragmatism and people skills its participants develop - mainly through contact with the real world". Further clarification about how OMD fits into a managerial skills framework can be gathered from the analysis of Hattie *et al.* (1997, p. 66) in which forty major outcomes of adventure programmes were identified. These were further subdivided into six categories of leadership, self-concept, academic, personality, interpersonal and adventuresomeness. In this study, it was found that the effects across the six dimensions were systematically high and maintained over time for all categories but adventuresomeness. In the category of "interpersonal", there are the skills of productive teamwork and group co-operation, interpersonal communication (likeability, trust and listening), social competence (which includes social aptitude, sociability and friendliness), positive behaviour (reducing behavioural problems and inducing positive behaviours), relating skills, (such as sensitivity to others), and reduction in recidivism.

A similar emphasis is to be found in the literature produced by OMD providers. For example, the course booklet for IMPACT, one of the largest outdoor training organisations in the U..K., offers this information:

> Our projects present a huge range of mind boggling tasks, from half hour problem solving through day long business simulations to a week immersed in the management of a national charity. They are real-world projects using practical real world skills (1998, p. 29).

The courses run by Outward Bound Professional also reveal a skills based emphasis:

> Outward Bound Professional programmes supply learning at three levels - skills, knowledge, values and beliefs. Leadership programmes create multi - skilled leaders with vision and dynamism. While combining complementary skills and talents to achieve a task, participants experiment with various styles

> of leadership, gathering an awareness of communicating, understanding and motivating to achieve results. (1998, p. 4).

Indeed, it is not surprising that an improvement in communication skills is one of the objectives espoused by most outdoor development courses. Indeed, it would appear that OMD provides an appropriate medium for the development of a range of managerial skills and abilities. In common with physical skills, managerial skills are developed through frequent use and reflective practice and thus, through the process of encountering a variety of outdoor problems and reviewing their approaches, it has been argued that developmental activities act as an "enabling mechanism" for managers, rather than a provider of information (Annandale, 1986). Theoretically therefore, when courses are designed to develop particular managerial skills, the intended outcomes should result. The question which is crucially unanswered is what *are* the mechanisms used to develop managerial skills in OMD and how might these skills be transferred back to the workplace?

2.8 Identifying an Agenda for Studying the Processes of Outdoor Management Development Provision - Summary

As the previous sections have highlighted, despite the rapid expansion in the provision of OMD, there is a lack of both empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives to support evaluation of the learning process and its transfer to the workplace. Although the outdoors is now used by many businesses to provide a powerful learning arena for managers through the use of the experiential learning cycle, most of the research that has been carried out shows a strong accent on the behavioural effects of courses and is, therefore, outcome driven. Indeed, despite a plethora of positive anecdotal accounts, there is still comparatively little work focusing upon the *means* by which OMD courses achieve their objectives and there is a dearth of research to support the linkage between the outdoor experience and applied learning in work contexts. Amongst the proposed benefits of OMD programmes, a common theme is the development of managerial skills, including the skills of communication, productive group working and relating to others.

The next chapter will establish the development of skills in conflict handling as one of the potential outcomes of OMD. The nature and process of conflict handling are also explored, and the development of conflict handling skills is established as a legitimate focus for analysing the mechanisms of learning in OMD.

Chapter Three

Conflict Management

3.1 Introduction

Through examination of the OMD literature, Chapter Two established the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer as suitable areas for investigation. However, in order to further analyse these mechanisms, it is appropriate to focus upon a particular skill domain. Accordingly, this chapter will explore the nature of conflict handling, highlight the process through which conflict levels are optimised and confirm the development of conflict handling skills as a legitimate area for the purpose of investigating the learning and transfer of skills *via* OMD. In many ways, the literature on conflict management parallels that of OMD. As a managerial issue, conflict has received a surge of interest in the last 20 years as the impact of conflict in organisations has been recognised. However, despite the widespread interest in, and adoption of, programmes to develop competence in conflict management, there remains a dearth of information concerning the skills required and, consequently, a lack of evaluative frameworks to support skill development. Accordingly, this chapter will show how the development of conflict handling skills may accrue as one of the potential outcomes of OMD and establish this skill domain as an appropriate focus for examining the mechanisms of learning *via* OMD.

3.2 The Nature of Conflict

Conflict is extremely common in business. Pressure to meet performance targets, lack of resources, change or power differences may give rise to conflict and accordingly, managers are often required to intervene. In the last twenty years, there has been a rapid increase both in the study of work conflict and the industry of conflict resolution training as the significance of conflict in organisations has been realised.

It is arguable that much of the psychological study of social and psychological conflict grew out of the work done by Lewin (Maruyama, 1992). Lewin's theory on

tension systems and group processes also prompted research on competition and co-operation (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1983). Although most of the research on conflict theory has been carried out by psychologists, there have also been substantial contributions from other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology (Boardman & Horowitz, 1994). Indeed, as organisational boundaries have become more fluid, the interfaces at which conflict occurs have become varied and wide ranging (Drucker, 1986). The label "conflict" is sometimes used loosely to refer to the stress and frustration which arise from tension between people and the environment in which they find themselves (Huczynski, 1991). Conflict has also been described as the result of two more parties interacting to make a decision, meet an objective or solve a problem and when a) factors within the setting or amongst the parties cause self interests to clash, b) people's reactions cause negative reactions in others or c) parties who are unable to resolve a controversy lash out at one another (Muniz & Chasnoff, 1989). Some writers have defined conflict as existing "whenever incompatible activities occur" Deutsch (1973, p. 10) and as arising from the different goals and interests of organisational sub-units (Benson, 1973). Indeed, there is still no universally accepted definition of conflict in the literature (Thomas, 1999). Rather, there seem to be two general approaches which reflect different perspectives. The first appears to be concerned with opposition or interference and allows for competitive intentions (Schmidt & Kochan, 1972). This definition is closer to the traditional usage of the term "conflict", and is especially popular in the industrial relations literature (e.g. strikes and union negotiations). The second approach has been to adopt a general definition which encompasses a broader range of phenomena by allowing for modes of conflict handling other than competition (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Indeed, as Putnam and Poole (1987) have observed, there appears to be a family of definitions which include the themes of interdependence (between the conflicting parties), perceptions of incompatibility amongst the parties concerned, and some form of interaction. Although these groups of definitions are interrrelated, researchers have focused on different parts of these themes. Therefore, given the individual nature of many conflict interactions, it is difficult to arrive at a universal definition but for the purposes of this thesis, conflict will be defined as "a form of interaction between parties who differ in interests, perceptions or

preferences" (Brown, 1979, p.378). This perspective allows for differences between individuals and groups to be a part of conflict interactions as well as the presence of more traditional "win / lose" encounters.

Organisational conflict takes many forms: a strike amongst employees, peaceful bargaining or grievance handling, boycotts, political action, sabotage, absenteeism, the employment of external figures as arbiters or moves to replace particular managers with others. Thus, many of these conflicts occur on an individual as well as a collective basis and arise out of different conditions. For example, some conflicts are stimulated by the organisational environment as a result of changing structures and systems. Redundancies, internal restructuring and changes in lines of responsibility can cause conflict to occur in this way and it may also escalate as a result of unequal reward systems, resource scarcities or pronounced differences in design, time orientation or managerial style. In recent years, organisations have required people to be increasingly flexible, demonstrate creativity and imagination in their work, and rapidly acquire new competencies. Individual responses to these demands vary considerably and this can render conflict levels susceptible to change as a result of diverse goals, variations in gender, power or culture, or the different attitudes and perceptions of organisational members. Conflict may be classified as inter-organisational (i.e. between organisations) and intra-organisational (within an organisation). On this basis, intra-organisational conflict may be further categorised as inter-group, interpersonal and intra-personal. Although these categories assist in clarifying the ways in which conflict may be manifest in business, there is much less coverage of the skills required to manage conflict at these levels. The literature offers an explanation of these categories as follows:

1. *Inter-organisational conflict*

Many of the accounts of conflict between organisations refer to organisational theory or sociological analyses which discuss mergers and take-overs (Haunschild, 1993), corporate power and control (Brass & Burghardt, 1993), managing change (Amburgey, Kelly & Barnett, 1993), or strategic decision making (Pondy, Boland & Thomas, 1988). Other factors discussed in conjunction with inter-organisational

conflict include historical and cultural differences, business unity, and the extent to which organisations are more or less "conflictful" entities (Lammers, 1990). Indeed, the precise nature of inter-organisational conflict is difficult to define for two reasons in particular. Firstly, the boundaries between organisations are becoming blurred. The rising popularity of consultancy, closer relationships between customers and suppliers, partnerships and joint projects have all meant that it is increasingly difficult to see where one organisation ends and the other begins. Secondly, inter-organisational conflict is not only to be found where organisations have directly opposing interests but also when they have common concerns. For example, there was conflict between parties with fiercely hostile views in the wave of mergers and take-overs during the 1980's, particularly in the United States. At this time, corporations previously thought invulnerable were increasingly subject to attempts by outsiders to buy control - often against the wishes of top management. In some cases, specialist firms were set up to act on behalf of potential buyers and were paid a fee for deciding where the investment group should put its money, completing the transaction and helping to generate healthy profits afterwards. Conversely, conflict may also occur between organisations who actively work to maintain a co-operative relationship with one another. Even when the parties have compatible interests, differences and disagreements frequently arise and this may escalate into conflict. Thus, not only are organisational boundaries becoming indistinct, conflict is to be found between organisations with opposite interests as well as between those who are co-operative in their interrelationship.

2. *Inter-group Conflict*

This type of conflict occurs between two or more units or groups within an organisation. Indeed, it is not surprising that the needs, values, goals and working practices of groups are frequently at odds and, although they are part of the same organisation, their self-interests may pull them in different directions. The dynamics of escalating or decreasing levels of conflict have implications for intergroup relations both within and between the groups involved. Between groups, conflict can promote distrust and negative stereotyping, increased emphasis on differences, decreased communication and distortion of the communications that do occur. This

combination of negative influences can create a cycle which means that defensive aggression by one group makes the other group suspicious and promotes counter aggression, causing conflict to escalate. An opposite scenario, in which trust, co-operation, and positive stereotypes are generated, may also create a cycle of increasing co-operation between the groups (Deutsch, 1973). Consequently, the interesting interaction between competition and co-operation has often been discussed in the context of inter-group relations (Deutsch, 1949; Tjosvold & Chia, 1989). In this literature, competition and co-operation have been regarded as conditions which generate different levels of perceived goal conflict between groups, and conclusions that goals are competitive (rather than co-operative) have been found to influence conflict management. Thus, in a competitive situation, the goal attainment of one party makes it less likely that others will reach their goals but, in co-operative scenarios, movement towards one's goal facilitates others moving towards theirs. Thus, groups may believe that their goals are competitive (each wanting the best possible outcome for themselves and not the other) or co-operative (wanting the best possible plan for both). Groups who believe their goals to be competitive try to win the conflict, make unreasonable demands, pursue their own interests at the expense of others and often fail to reach agreement. Those who believe their goals are co-operative have been found to express their opinions openly, exchange information and ideas, explore and understand each other's perspectives and work for mutually acceptable solutions. (Tjosvold & Chia, 1989). There seems to be a link between a co-operative situation and group formation and it seems that that greater group and organisational productivity can be expected when groups are co-operative rather than competitive in their interrelationship. The communication of ideas, co-ordination of efforts and pride in one's own group which form the basis for harmony and effectiveness appear to be disrupted when members see themselves as competing for mutually exclusive goals. Relationships characterised by the typical effects of co-operation - trust, openness and mutual assistance for example, are expected to encourage people in conflict to believe that they have co-operative goals and thus unfriendly inter-individual relationships have been found to be typical of competitive rather than co-operative groups.

3. *Interpersonal Conflict*

This refers to conflict between two or more organisational members of the same or different hierarchical levels. Hence, the marketing, personnel and production departments may all be part of the same institution, but their interests may clash. As people have different aspirations and goals, it is inevitable that there will be some conflict as they strive to achieve them. There seems to be some agreement in the literature about the merits of allowing a measure of interpersonal conflict to surface. This means that people can openly air disagreements or different points of view - whether their interests are compatible or not - and at the same time, agree a constructive way forward. These ideas have also been extended to include the idea that interpersonal conflict is an essential ingredient for organisational growth and development, and that managers should admit to having conflict and even welcome it. This does not mean that conflict should be introduced into every available meeting or debate - indeed, the negative effects of too much conflict are well documented - ingrained hostility between individuals, inferior decisions and lack of commitment to much needed changes. Rather, the literature implies that a lot of energy is wasted denying the existence of conflict when it could be used to constructively explore and resolve differences. Interpersonal conflict is therefore a social process, involving more than one person.

4. *Intra-personal Conflict*

According to Roloff (1987), this type of conflict occurs when there is incompatibility or inconsistency among an individual's cognitive elements (which) implies that a new cognitive element is at variance with a prior explanation or expectation. Thus, intra-personal conflict reflects a challenge to a person's basis for prediction and control resulting in greater uncertainty. An individual experiences intra-personal conflict when they are pushed or pulled in opposite directions; that is, the alternatives are both attractive or unattractive. Kurt Lewin (1948) categorised this type of conflict when he proposed three sub categories which hold an individual between two valances of equal strength: approach - approach (both positive), avoidance - avoidance (both negative), and approach - avoidance (one positive and one negative). Thus, intra-personal conflict occurs when an organisational member is required to

perform certain tasks and roles that do not match his or her expertise, interests, goals or values (Rahim, 1992).

3.3 The Significance of Conflict in Organisations

Conflict is of significance to organisations for one reason in particular - namely, its influence on performance and productivity (Fisher, 1994). The extent to which conflict enhances or inhibits performance appears to be linked particularly to the amount of conflict present. Indeed, the negative effects associated with too much conflict have received considerable attention in the literature (Barney, 1986; Baron, 1989; Van di Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990). These include decreased communication between conflicting parties, escalation of aggression and negative stereotyping which contribute to a deterioration of working relationships. The idea that too little conflict is dysfunctional has received less coverage however (Goddard, 1986; Davidson, 1990) but nonetheless, a lack of conflict can mean that groups and individuals reach decisions which have failed to take account of vital pieces of information or where little attention is paid to problem areas - causing apathy and complacency in organisations. What emerges from these accounts is that some conflict is desirable, if not essential, for effective performance. It is now widely acknowledged that moderate levels of conflict are associated with informed problem solving and constructive decision making processes which take account of diverse perspectives (Baron, 1997). The modern view of conflict acknowledges that no organisational design or managerial strategy could (or should) eliminate conflict altogether. Consequently, conflict is now regarded as an important stimulus for change and optimum levels have been shown to actually increase organisational performance (Feather, 1990; Beer & Walton, 1990; Pondy, 1992; Tjosvold, 1997). As the capacity of conflict to influence productivity has been acknowledged, the issue of conflict management has become important and the process of conflict handling is now considered to be a key managerial function (De Dreu, 1997).

3.4 The Process of Conflict Handling

In 1976, a study by the American Management Association found that mid and top level managers spend approximately 20% of their time dealing with conflict (Thomas

& Schmidt, 1976). Indeed, the task of regulating conflict often falls to the manager and this process is now regarded as an important managerial attribute. Therefore, the managers' job is to allow enough conflict to facilitate constructive decision making processes, but not too much that communication and co-operation breaks down. The literature offers many suggestions about how to regulate conflict levels to optimum and, whilst it is evident that managers will encounter conflict at different organisational levels, no clear data exist to demonstrate the genericity or specificity of approaches within or between these settings.

In extending this contention, proponents of the "contingency perspective" advocate that what is effective can best be determined in the light of situational realities. Thus, certain approaches to conflict management may be appropriate under particular circumstances because each situation requires a unique response (e.g. Hocker & Wilmot, 1991; Rahim, 1992). Conversely, a "one way best" practice in dealing with conflict has been advocated by a number of scholars (e.g. Blake & Mouton, 1981; Fisher & Ury, 1981; Pneuman & Bruehl, 1982). Their work demonstrates that compared to the five conflict handling modes of avoidance, accommodation, compromise, collaboration and competition (proposed by Thomas & Kilmann in 1974), problem solving (i.e. reconciling both parties' basic interests) is a constructive mode of conflict management because it unites people against the issue, stimulates creativity and tends to be mutually beneficial (Van di Vliert *et al.*, 1999). In 1992, Kenneth Thomas attempted to integrate these two approaches by using his *time perspective* to assert that the contingency approach provides solutions to the short term questions of how to deal with the here and now, whilst the "one way best" approach deals with the longer term task of what is best for the organisation. Building on this work in 1999, Van di Vliert *et al.* proposed the addition of a *complexity perspective*, which combines problem solving and forcing (i.e. furthering one's own interests by directly challenging the opponent). The findings of these studies provide support for the idea that a combination of problem solving and forcing behaviours may work best in conflict situations.

In common with these perspectives, a number of studies on conflict management have focused upon **tactical** responses to conflict, by concentrating on approaches to conflict handling which are situation specific, whilst others have been concerned with general **strategies** which are broader based and applicable across different conflict situations (Womack, 1988; Rubin, Pruitt & Hee Kim, 1994). Implicit in these approaches are different assumptions about the situational nature of conflict management preferences, but these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. The following example illustrates this point:

> Philly has just offered a plan for increasing sales. John says he has a few questions about Philly's plan. But before John has finished with his "few questions", Philly's plan is dead. Everybody in the room knows that it was the conflict between Philly and John, not the merits of Philly's idea that killed the plan. ...The two clashed five years ago and never resolved the conflict and it continues to impede not only their work relationship but the performance of the department as a whole as the two work out their feelings (Muniz & Chasnoff, 1986, p. 34)

In this situation, there are choices to be made about how to handle the conflict. From the outset, Philly and John have various *tactics* which they can use. These include risky moves, such as conceding with the expectation of receiving a return concession, mentioning possible compromises as talking points, and revealing their (or the other parties') underlying interests. They also include cautious moves, such as hinting at possible compromises, appointing a third party to discuss the issues or communicating through back channels. In addition, theory and research have identified four main *strategies* that may be adopted by Philly or John in this situation. These include C*ontending* - where parties remain committed to their position and try to persuade the other party to yield to this position, *Yielding* - which is the opposite of contending, where parties give in to their opponent's demands, *Problem Solving* - where parties seek to achieve mutually acceptable solutions by looking at all the possible options and *Avoidance* - in which the parties deny the existence of conflict and do nothing (De Dreu, 1997). Critical in the decision about which strategy to apply is the extent to which each party wishes to take his or her opponent's goals into consideration. In this situation, as in all others, Philly and John are active participants and this will involve strenuous efforts to understand many aspects of the conflict -

the options available to them, the potential gains or losses that may result from these, the intentions and actions of their opponents, and so on. Indeed, the ways in which parties to a conflict situation think about the situation, the factors they take into account, and the conclusions and judgements they reach - all these cognitive processes play a powerful part in their behaviour and therefore, in the ultimate outcome achieved by both sides (Baron, 1997). Thus, it seems probable that a combination of approaches (i.e. tactical and strategic) *may* produce optimum results (and this idea has been recently supported by the work of Van di Vliert *et al.,* 1999), but current research in this area offers little guidance about the consequences of one approach over another, or about the methodologies to be used by training providers in order to develop these techniques. Indeed, despite many suggestions in the literature about effective conflict management, there is less consensus about the particular skills, or blend of skills that managers require. Moreover, a discussion about the skills involved in constructive conflict resolution has been missing from many accounts of conflict handling and, as Deutsch has observed:

> This factor of abilities and skills is not sufficiently emphasised in theoretical discussions. I suggest that many destructive conflicts between nations, groups and individuals result from their lack of skills related to the procedures involved in constructive conflict resolution, and I further suggest that training in these skills should be more widespread (1994, p.24).

Thus, the expansion of interest in work conflict has been driven by the realisation that conflict is unavoidable. However, the potential effects of conflict, which may be positive or negative, have focused attention upon the importance of conflict handling i.e. regulating conflict levels to optimum. Although this process has now come to be regarded as a key managerial function, there remains a fundamental lack of information about the skills required for conflict regulation. Crucially, despite the many suggestions about conflict handling in the literature, there is an absence of empirical evidence to support the development of the skills involved. Indeed, as the next section will show, this is a vital issue for managers and training providers alike.

3.5 Conflict Handling Skills

Managers need skills similar to those of a trained negotiator if they are to successfully handle conflicts. For the purposes of this thesis, the term "skill" will be referred to as "the ability that comes from knowledge, practice and aptitude" (New Hamblyn World Dictionary 1988, p.1566). Thus, in respect of conflict handling, pertinent and consequently generic skills might involve, for example, establishing a co-operative, problem solving approach, developing a creative process whereby individuals and groups can explore their options for resolving the conflict and abilities which enable the situation to be viewed for an outside "depersonalised" perspective (Folberg & Taylor, 1984). More specifically, it has been suggested that third parties (e.g. counsellors, therapists or managers) who are called upon to deal with conflict need four kinds of skills (Deutsch, 1994). The first group of skills relate to establishing a good working relationship with the conflicting parties in order to promote an atmosphere of trust, open communication and responsiveness. The second set of skills concern the creation of a constructive, co-operative approach to the conflict on behalf of those involved, and thirdly there are skills to do with developing a creative decision making process which facilitates a realistic assessment of potential courses of action. Finally, it is often helpful for third parties to have information about the issues around which the conflict is centred.

Unfortunately however, in many conflict situations, there is little feedback available for managers to work with in order to develop skilled performance. In the social science literature, there are many discussions about giving and receiving feedback in co-operative situations but, during conflicts, people often do not question whether they have communicated well or not; they assume that they have been understood without examining the reactions to their interventions or checking their own feelings. Understandably, there is little written about the skills involved in the art of lying or bluffing or knowing when someone is doing it to you:

> ...without special effort and skill, the participant in a conflict may get no feedback or ambiguous or misleading information about the effectiveness of his behaviour. Hence, training in conflict resolution involves training in the skills of eliciting and giving clear feedback to the others with whom one is in conflict. The skills that are required are considerably less complex where one

> can be sure that the parties in conflict are not trying to mislead or deceive one another than when one cannot have this confidence (Deutsch, 1994, p. 26).

In this respect, the outdoors may offer something "value added" in aiding the process of skills learning and development, since it allows for natural behaviours to be exhibited and for feedback to inform skills practice. Indeed, the outdoor environment has often been referred to as a great "leveller" as it is harder for participants to stand aside from the process that it is in more conventional (indoor) training environments.

However, no manager is a novice when they start training in conflict handling. Every individual has been an observer or participant in conflicts from childhood and these experiences are likely to result in preconceptions, attitudes and modes of behaviour which are deeply ingrained before any exposure to systematic training. Furthermore, people tend to vary greatly in the degree to which they are self-aware and therefore managerial experience on its own may not be a sound indicator of competence in conflict management. Given these circumstances, it would seem to be imperative that bespoke training and development programmes are provided in order to help managers develop such skills. Nonetheless, there remains a lack of underlying knowledge about which skills are appropriate or indeed, how they should be applied. Without this crucial information, it is difficult to envisage how the appropriate training provision can be designed. Furthermore, previous experience and individual perceptions are not the only variables to be considered when analysing skills in conflict handling. Much learning goes on after a skill has been acquired (Anderson, 1982). This learning involves an improvement in the choice of method by which the task should be performed, a consideration of alternative ways of tackling the problem and a selection of the most appropriate actions. Indeed, as the learner becomes more accomplished, the method of selection becomes increasingly judicious and, in terms of learning theory, this process could be described as similar to the issue of trial-and-error versus insight in problem solving. Hence, a novice's search for a solution initially may involve trial and error but, with experience, the process becomes increasingly selective and more likely to lead to rapid success. Arguably, the outdoor medium is ideally placed to promote such a process as it is by its very nature "experiential" (Dennison & Kirk, 1990). Thus, variables such as the amount of

previous exposure to conflict as well as the opportunity to practice skills in different contexts appear to be important considerations when analysing the design of outdoor management development provision.

In order to effectively deal with conflict, managers require knowledge as well as skills practice (Deutsch, 1994). Therefore, productive outcomes are more likely when managers possess both knowledge about the nature of the conflict and experience of skills application in different contexts. Knowledge about the nature of conflict will enable the effective transfer of skills learnt in one environment to meet the challenges set by another:

> Although knowledge by itself of the principles of constructive conflict resolution alone is usually insufficient to produce skilled behaviour, it - along with skills practised in diverse contexts can facilitate the generalisation of these skills so that they are applied in a wide range of situations. (1994, p. 25)

Although the literature contains many pieces of advice about conflict handling, this information tends to focus upon the requisite knowledge rather than the mandatory skills required. Hence, despite the acknowledgement that skills are important, there is little guidance about what these explicitly comprise, their linkage with the knowledge component, or indeed about the extensive practice which is necessary to facilitate effective application. In fact, consideration of the ways in which both knowledge and skills are optimally acquired would provide a foundation for identifying the essential components of management training programmes. As Deutsch has observed:

> Despite the development of a growing industry of conflict resolution training, there has been little relevant systematic theorizing or research in this area. We know little about educating people in the skills, as distinct from the knowledge and attitudes involved in effective conflict resolution. Nor have we given much thought to how conflict effectiveness is to be defined and measured, nor whether conflict effectiveness is generalized or situation specific (1994, p. 29)

Thus, there are few evaluative frameworks for skills development in conflict handling and despite a plethora of information about constructive conflict management, there is a lack of research to support the role of knowledge in skill

acquisition. Thus, although the work by Van di Vliert *et al.*, (1999) provides additional and more specific empirical support for the crude behavioural recommendation that conflict at work pays, this research does not highlight, or indeed resolve, the issue of skills learning, or the subsequent transfer of such skills once acquired, into work settings.

3.6 Outdoor Management Development and the Acquisition of Conflict Handling Skills

It is interesting to note how many of the unresolved issues in respect of conflict handling are mirrored in the domain of OMD. Indeed, as the previous chapter has shown, despite numerous claims made for the outdoors and its use in training and development, there is a paucity of empirical evidence to support the learning of management *skills* which are so crucially required. Moreover, there is comparatively little evidence to support the efficacy of one type of methodology over another when analysing skills development and, in addition, there are few theoretically driven frameworks for analysing the mechanisms by which learning transfer may be achieved. As this section will demonstrate, the development of skills in conflict handling may accrue as one of the potential outcomes of OMD and therefore it is proposed that this particular skill area provides an appropriate focus for analysing the learning and transfer mechanisms of OMD.

As Chapter Two has demonstrated, much of OMD provision is concerned with the development of managerial skills, including the skills of conflict handling. For example, in 1997, Philip Schofield wrote:

> Outdoor development courses have proved particularly effective in helping managers to explore their own abilities, limitations and motivations and in giving them the confidence to handle new situations in which past experience offers few guidelines. They are also excellent in helping to develop team working, leadership, communication, problem solving and decision making skills (p. 9).

In a similar vein, Mossman commented:

> The focus of most OMD activities is on the development of process and interpersonal skills...OMD has been used to help management groups to develop skills in the collective co-ordination, monitoring, control and planning of more complex operations. In larger organisations no one individual can possibly comprehend all the parameters. Collective decision making is vital. That requires trust coupled with a wide knowledge of one's colleague's strengths and weaknesses (1983, p. 193).

The examples cited above are selected from a vast array of accounts which describe the outcomes of OMD in terms of the skills relevant to conflict management (c.f. Creswick & Williams, 1979; Bank, 1994; Waters 1982; Foy, 1981; Hattie, 1997). Unfortunately however, in the domain of conflict handling, there is less clarity about the precise nature of these skills and, in OMD, there is a lack of evaluative frameworks to assess skill development. Thus, in order to address these issues, it seems pertinent to consider the literature on cognitive skill acquisition as arguably, the skills of conflict handling are applied primarily through the process of human cognition. Accordingly, our attention is drawn to the problem of the learning and transfer of cognitive skills, of which conflict handling skills are a part. Therefore, the next chapter links the role of knowledge in skill acquisition to the issue of learning transfer, using skills in conflict handling as an example. Subsequently, this discussion will provide a foundation for Chapter Five, which presents a new framework for analysing skills development via OMD.

3.7 Conflict Management - Summary

This chapter has explored the nature of conflict, the process of conflict regulation and the development of conflict handling skills. The term "conflict" has been defined in the context of business as the result of differences in perceptions, interests and preferences between organisational members. The literature offers many descriptions of conflict which may be categorised as inter-organisational, intra or inter-group and intra-personal. Conflict is an important organisational phenomenon because it of its influence on performance and productivity and this has been linked particularly to the amount of conflict present. Too much conflict can thwart lines of communication and result in escalation of aggression, but too little conflict may mean that work

colleagues reach decisions which fail to take account of all the available information. Therefore, the accent is on allowing a measure of conflict to surface – enough to allow for constructive debate and criticism, but not too much that working relationships deteriorate. As the significance of conflict in organisations has been realised, the issue of conflict management has become important and the process of conflict handling (i.e. regulating conflict levels to optimum) is now regarded as a critical part of the managers' role. The literature offers a number of suggestions about how to regulate conflict, including the "one way best" and contingency perspectives. These positions reflect different assumptions about the nature of conflict management preferences but are not mutually exclusive. Subsequently, these viewpoints are represented as *tactical* (situation specific) and *strategic* (broader based) approaches. However, despite many suggestions about how to manage conflict, including the tactical and strategic approaches conceptualised in the literature, there is a lack of coverage about the *skills* which are crucially required. Appropriate skills might include, for example, establishing a creative environment where conflict participants can rehearse problem solving approaches, negotiating as a third party to resolve the conflict or appealing to longer term organisational objectives, but research in this area offers little guidance as to the precise nature of the requisite skills or indeed, the circumstances under which such skills may best be deployed in business settings. In addition, there are other variables which are likely to be significant in skill acquisition, such as the amount of previous exposure to conflict in organisations and the degree of practice in skills application. As an essential component of skill, knowledge is also important in the development of competence in conflict handling and therefore a combination of knowledge and skills practice is required. Consequently, a consideration of the ways in which conflict handling skills are optimally acquired, (and indeed, transferred from training events to work settings) would appear to provide an important starting point for the design and implementation of management development programmes, but the literature offers little guidance on this issue. Thus, there are few evaluative frameworks for analysing knowledge and skills development in conflict handling and, as Chapter Two has shown, many of these problems are replicated in the domain of OMD. For example, despite the plethora of positive anecdotal accounts, there is comparatively

little empirical support for the notion that OMD is effective in developing managerial skills. Furthermore, there is a lack of research to underpin the use of any one particular approach over another in respect of learning transfer. Finally, since the development of skills in conflict handling may accrue as a potential outcome of outdoor programmes, it is proposed that this skill domain provides a useful focus for examining the issue of skills learning and transfer via OMD. Therefore, as the deployment of such skills is the product of human cognition, the next chapter utilises the literature on cognitive skill acquisition to further analyse skills development in conflict handling. Thereafter, this discussion provides the basis for chapter Five in which a new theoretical framework for clarifying the learning mechanisms of OMD is presented.

Chapter Four

The Acquisition and Transfer of Cognitive Skills

4.1 Introduction

This chapter extends consideration of the issues of skills learning and transfer by using the literature on cognitive skill acquisition to demonstrate how different approaches to OMD may affect learning outcomes. Using skills in conflict handling as an example, the discussion identifies three types of knowledge and shows how each may be differentially developed via particular course designs. These ideas are then linked to the process of learning transfer i.e. the degree to which skills acquired via the outdoor event can be applied in a new setting, usually the workplace. Subsequently, this discussion provides the foundation for Chapter Five which presents a new theoretical framework for analysing skills development in OMD.

4.2 Definitions

Broadly stated, *Cognition* is "the act or process of knowing / perception, or the product of such a process" (New Hamblyn World Dictionary 1988, p. 319) and as such, refers to all aspects of human mental functions (Resnick, 1987). This includes knowledge acquisition, knowledge production and self-knowledge (Dillon and Sternberg, 1986 cited in Idol, Jones and Mayer, 1991). In the literature on cognitive skill acquisition, "skill" is referred to as a quality of performance which is developed through training, practice or experience (Starkes and Allard, 1993). Skills have been defined in terms of levels of proficiency in a task or group of tasks, and as a product of both an individual and the environment. Indeed, skills always have reference to particular tasks and, since tasks are typically goal directed, so are skills (Weiss, 1991). Researchers in this area accept that skills consist of behaviours that are sequentially and hierarchically organised and that an essential problem of skill development is to understand the transition from the piecemeal, hesitant performance of the novice to the polished, smooth performance of the expert. Thus, while managers may come to recognise that active listening, taking the perspective of others and using "I" rather than "you" messages, are good things to do when in

conflict, without repeated practice in the use of such skills, they may not be able to engage successfully in the behaviours which exemplify them.

As Chapter Three has illustrated, managers require the skills of a trained negotiator in order to deal effectively with work conflict (Rahim, 1992; Folberg and Taylor, 1984; Kressel, 1985). Indeed, this idea fits well with the move away from an emphasis on the operational areas of management (i.e. finance or marketing) towards the development of process skills which many accounts now highlight as being important in management learning. "Process skills" in this context are the skills of enabling and facilitating interactions between individuals and groups. They also include a set of sub - skills, such as the ability to understand and analyse individual interactions, and to appreciate and analyse the political dimension of organisations (Taylor, 1984; Silver, 1991). Thus, process skills have much in common with the skills involved in effective conflict management and, as Chapter One has shown, this skill domain also features as an outcome of OMD programmes (Creswick and Williams, 1979; Waters, 1982; Hattie *et. al.*, 1997).

4.3 The Role of Knowledge in Cognitive Skill Acquisition

Although the role of knowledge in skills development has been acknowledged in the conflict handling literature, debates in other subject areas such as psychology and education offer pertinent information for understanding issues of skills learning and transfer. In the last decade, there has been an extraordinary confluence of ideas about how knowledge acquisition and learning take place (Idol, Jones and Mayer, 1991). Indeed, learning is no longer conceptualised as a process whereby the learner uses rote memory to link a series of unconnected facts (Downey and Kelly, 1983). Rather, the emphasis has moved towards the idea of students interacting with their environment by constantly reviewing experience and linking fresh material to prior knowledge. In this way, hypotheses are tested and revised and information is integrated into new perspectives which result in behavioural modification (Gibbs, 1992, cited in Burke, 1995). In parallel with these changes, one of the major trends in management development has been the move towards experiential approaches which combine knowledge and skills practice (Mumford, 1987). Knowledge on its own,

may be insufficient to enable managers to intervene constructively as third parties or to manage conflicts on an individual basis (Rahim, 1992).

Following this logic, managers require knowledge as well as skills practice in order to become competent at conflict handling. If this idea were applied to OMD events, both knowledge acquisition and skills application would be expected to feature in course designs. Discussions about cognitive skill development also support this view, thus managers ought to perform better if they have knowledge about the conflict - its sources, the people involved and the available strategies for dealing with the situation - than when this knowledge is unavailable.

There are various definitions of knowledge on offer, some of which refer directly to the concept and others which link knowledge to performance. "A first criterion of knowledge is that it should improve performance...knowledge is important for formulating the intended goals of actions; as well, knowledge facilitates actual performance" (Allard, 1993 p. 28). Simplistically, knowledge has been referred to as "knowing about knowing" as distinct from "fact, fact, fact" (Smargorinski and Smith, 1992). This includes knowledge of content (which is not only one's factual knowledge of information, but also knowledge of one's personal experiences i.e. knowledge that one can name), knowledge of form (which enables one to distinguish one thing from another according to its features), and conditional knowledge which is knowing when to apply knowledge of content or form (e.g. one may know when to exaggerate to produce humour, but conditional knowledge informs about when this is appropriate).

Anderson (1992) offers a structure built on three types or categories of knowledge. **Procedural Knowledge** concerns knowing how to perform something. This is where the knowledge is automised into a series of "productions", which are acts of cognition that make things happen. Anderson argues that procedural knowledge is central to cognitive skill development and in this context, the learner would follow a set of "if...then..." procedures which move them gradually towards the desired outcome. The aim of this process is to progressively reduce the number of

productions required for a particular outcome so that the application of the knowledge becomes automatic. Consequently, the learner would decide the conditions under which the knowledge could be applied and then engage in appropriate actions depending on the circumstances. This idea links well with the contingency perspective on conflict resolution outlined in Chapter Three, in which it is suggested that the approach should be adjusted according to the circumstances. Thus, procedural knowledge is likely to feature in *tactical* methods of conflict resolution which are situation specific and, under these circumstances, managers would make a series of decisions which are progressive and linked to the particular conflict situation. Consequently, the approach is action based and knowledge could be used to select the best response to the conflict, create an environment of openness and trust between conflicting parties, and to seek feedback about the consequences of particular outcomes. This perspective is also consistent with messages in the conflict handling literature which recommend matching styles to situations (Hart, 1991; Rahim, 1992; Thomas, 1992). If this idea were to inform the design of OMD events, managers would participate in an outdoor activity and deal with conflict arising from the experience. Following this phase, the debrief session would emphasise progressive stages of conflict resolution which are situation specific and, in this way, managers would be encouraged to learn routines pertaining to particular conflict situations. Following the logic of this approach, OMD events would be expected to include scenarios where managers are given the opportunity to practice and adapt their skills application according to the conflict setting and knowledge would be integrated into specific training approaches whereby the skills are applied progressively and adjusted according to the circumstances. (Burke and Collins, 1998)

The second category, **Declarative Knowledge** has been described as "schemata, scripts, frames or knowledge structures" and concerns the network of facts which takes up our working memory (Starkes & Allard, 1993 p. 110). For sense to be made of declarative knowledge, the learner has to problem solve to sort out how the facts can be applied. Pennington, *et al.*, (1995) argue that declarative knowledge has an important contribution to make in promoting "learning by understanding". So, in respect of conflict handling, declarative knowledge is likely to be used in *strategic*

approaches, in which the skills are applied generically across situations (Thomas, 1992; Rubin, Pruitt and Hee Kim, 1994; Womack, 1988). In this context, facts would be compiled about the underlying conflict issues, the parties involved and the potential outcomes associated with various courses of action. This information would provide the foundation for a decision making process whereby managers uncover some general rules and constructs to guide their behaviour. This idea is consistent with the "one way best" perspective and is reflected in research which identifies broad strategies for dealing with conflict such as contending, yielding, problem solving or avoidance (De Dreu, 1997). If this perspective were employed, managers might participate in a bridge building or mountain rescue exercise and would be required to deal with the inevitable conflicts that occur. They may approach this process in a variety of ways and, after the experience, debrief sessions would be expected to focus on the rationale behind the actions of individuals with the objective of highlighting generic constructs underlying the process of conflict handling. Thus, the learning would centre around the development of declarative knowledge in order to facilitate skills application across a range of conflict situations. Indeed, if this approach were followed, OMD programmes would be expected to adopt developmental methodologies which emphasise the acquisition of knowledge and skills applied in diverse circumstances.

The final category is substantially under-researched but may still have implications for the learning of managerial skills. **Tacit knowledge** has been defined as an aspect of practically intelligent behaviour that is acquired through experience and is unrelated to general cognitive ability (Wagner, 1985). To date, very few studies of tacit knowledge have been undertaken in organisational settings. Polanyi (1966) has described tacit knowledge as "knowing more than we can tell" and viewed this knowledge as largely inarticulable. According to Polanyi (1958; 1966), tacit knowledge is primarily seen through an individual's actions rather than through specific explanations of what s/he knows. Thus tacit knowledge is viewed as a kind of practical know-how, where the knowledge is acquired through experience. Individuals who possess tacit knowledge may not be able to identify the facts which underlie their actions but research to date suggests that the development of this type

of knowledge is enabled by broad experience and sound understanding - in other words declarative knowledge. Be that as it may, the tactical and strategic approaches to conflict handling described above are not mutually exclusive and, in practice, it is probable that managers will use a combination of procedural and declarative knowledge in their skills application. Indeed, it has been suggested in research with sport performers that procedural and declarative knowledge are inter-linked (Abraham and Collins, 1998), but investigations into the relationship between procedural and declarative knowledge from the perspective of the manager have been minimal. Furthermore, since these types of knowledge may be differentially developed via different types of learning activity, it would seem obvious that OMD providers should *at least* understand the balance and its implications for the type of activities offered.

4.4 Learning Transfer

The decision about what balance of "learning style" to use is not the only concern for OMD providers. This section links the role of knowledge in cognitive skill acquisition to the issue of learning transfer i.e. the use of knowledge or skill acquired in one situation in the performance of a new, novel task. The term "learning transfer" refers to a student being able to apply what is learned during instruction to a different situation - usually the intended real performance (Pennington, *et. al.*, 1995). Researchers have attempted to understand the nature and scope of transfer throughout the present century (Thorndike, 1906; Higginson, 1931; Wertheimer, 1945; Gentner, 1983; Lewis, 1988; Singley and Anderson, 1989; Brown 1990; Detterman and Sternberg, 1993) and arguments about the nature and scope of transfer that were dominant in the early part of the century are still unresolved (Pennington, *et. al.*, 1995). Arguably, one of the key issues in determining the effectiveness of management development is that of transfer and the issue of reality in learning for managers has been a theme in this literature (Steifel, 1974; Drake, 1981; Mumford, 1987). Indeed, given the substantial differences between the outdoor environment in which the skills are learnt and the business settings in which the skills are applied, transfer is a crucial factor.

Scholars have long debated the extent to which people transfer knowledge from one context to another and a considerable body of literature has been directed to understanding this issue. The history of research in this area reveals cycles of strong claims and corresponding curricular changes, followed by failure to demonstrate transfer (Idol and Jones, 1991). As Mayer (1987 p. 75) commented: "From the Latin School Movement of the 1700's to the Head-Start Program of the 1960's, the search for teachable aspects of problem solving has generally failed to uncover evidence that students transfer what they have learned to new domains". Indeed, the issue of transferability has been described as one of the most vexing problems facing educational theorists. Questions about the extent to which knowledge use is specific, the processes which underlie knowledge transfer and whether it is possible to learn general problem solving skills have motivated debates about the design of school curricula and amongst academic disciplines which purport to teach transferable skills. Furthermore: "No conclusive evidence has emerged to validate or discredit any single perspective on the problem of how effectively people transfer general knowledge to particular situations" (Smagorinski and Smith, 1992 p. 280).

To date, the use of OMD has been based on the assumption that the outdoors provides a *real* environment in which to work and that individuals' behaviour in this setting will be reflective of the way that they operate in organisations (Doyle, 1989). Thus, the basic proposition is that managers learn as a result of having to deal with situations which have genuine consequences (Carioppe and Adamson, 1988) and, although it has been suggested that conducting a mountain rescue or leading a canoeing trip have nothing to do with the world of business, the central justification underlying the use of OMD is that the decision making processes are similar. In extending this contention, providers would propose that the skills required for negotiating with a frightened team member or putting forward an argument for allocation of resources are indeed relevant to work situations and that the effectiveness (or not) of these processes may result in genuine repercussions, such as the breakdown of a team because of failure to handle people effectively. However, despite the expansion of OMD, there is a dearth of empirical evidence to support these methodologies. Indeed, it appears that the issue of learning transfer is a

complex problem, which has been debated in respect of both indoor and outdoor management development provision. As Lucas has commented: "Measuring the impact of skills based training is also difficult, and one of the reasons suggested is that skills based training is not in itself easily transferred back to the workplace" (1992 p. 18).

Another problem is that some managers consider classroom environments irrelevant to work, because of the unreality of these settings (Mumford, 1987) and, as Bank (1994) admits, not all participants respond positively to OMD. Indeed, in some cases, the experience may even result in what has been termed "negative transfer". Under these circumstances, managers may return to work with unhelpful behaviours or attitudes which were not manifest before the programme commenced. Indeed, some authors have suggested that this variable may be influenced by the way in which the training is organised. For example, Sykes (1962) postulates that when leadership training is administered to managers of an intact organisation or unit, the result is likely to be changes to group norms and significant pressures to change the formal structural arrangements for administering the organisation. It has also been suggested that leadership training can have undesirable consequences for superior - subordinate relations, inter-group relations and the formal authority system:

> Social influences in the work environment explain why leadership training produces both functional and dysfunctional consequences. A general proposition may be drawn from the empirical literature: The consequences of leadership training depend on the degree to which the social influences in the trainee's work environment are viewed by the trainee as motivations to learn and the degree to which they reinforce the learned behaviour during and after training (House, 1968 p. 571)

Although these comments were written over thirty years ago, they may still hold implications for the learning of managerial skills, since they are consistent with the notion that a crucial factor in assessing the efficacy of OMD provision lies within the managers' own perceptions of what has been achieved. Another significant variable concerns the idea of skills practice and reinforcement, which has been a common theme in the education and training literature (Duncan, 1958; Dennison and Kirk, 1990; Dunnette and Hough, 1991; Cohen and Manion, 1998). Amongst the writings

on this topic, there is the proposition that, without sufficient organisational support, managers are under pressure to behave as they did before they received the training and thus, the development potential is lost.

4.5 The Issue of Fidelity

Debates about the transfer of cognitive skills have focused around the issue of **"fidelity"** i.e. the extent to which the tasks in the learning domain are similar to those in the real life situation. Once again, these considerations hold considerable importance for OMD, especially since contrasting approaches, both of which are apparent in the commercial sector, may either emphasise or consciously minimise the contrast between the outdoor learning and the business application setting. This section will now highlight two perspectives concerning the role of knowledge in the transfer of cognitive skills and show how these ideas have implications for the design and potential outcomes of OMD programmes.

Transfer of learning has been considered from two theoretical perspectives, both of which have implications for the design and potential outcomes of courses in conflict handling. Anderson (1992) has proposed that, in order for learning to be transferred from one situation to another, the tasks in the learning domain must closely replicate reality. Under this approach, the knowledge acquired while learning the skill is encapsulated in procedures called production rules. Transfer of learning is said to occur when the tasks share similar production rules. This is in fact an argument for **high fidelity**, where there is a close match between the tasks in the learning domain and the tasks required in the real life setting. This results in a fundamental principle of the theory – namely "specificity of knowledge", which states that it is not the knowledge that is acquired through training and practice, but a particular use of knowledge (Anderson, 1982; Singley and Anderson, 1989, cited in Pennington, Nicholich and Rahm, 1995). This idea is similar to the concepts outlined in Thorndike's (1914) "identical elements" theory, in which transfer was proposed to be a function of the degree of similarity between the elements involved in the performance of each task. In common with this view, Idol *et al.* commented: "when teachers teach for transfer, they should expect transfer to occur most strongly for

domains that are similar to the target material. Thus a major characteristic of cognitive instruction is its domain specificity" (1991 p. 75).

In contrast, Bransford *et al.* (1979) proposed that **low fidelity** is needed for transfer. This idea involves increasing the similarity between the cognitive processing requirements of the tasks in each situation. What is important therefore, are the cognitive processes involved in the tasks, not the tasks themselves. This idea is represented in the views of Pennington et. al. (1995) and other Gestalt psychologists, in which the role of declarative knowledge in skill application is emphasised:

> Learning by rote results in transfer to highly similar problems (i.e. procedural transfer) but learning by "understanding" results in transfer to less simliar or novel problems as well. In the same way that information processing concepts have allowed identical elements theories of transfer to progress from the early formulations, further investigations of the details of declarative elaboration and its translation into effective procedures may assist in bringing "understanding" as well into a theory of transfer (Pennington *et al.*, 1995 p. 221).

Thus, while researchers originally assumed that an increase in fidelity would enhance transfer of learning, recent research seems to indicate a more complex, non-linear relationship.

If these ideas were applied to OMD events, methodologies which emphasise short-term, action based training approaches (i.e. tactical methods of conflict handling) would be expected to maintain high fidelity. Thus, in the learning activities, explicit links would be made with conflicts in the workplace in order to promote transfer and the tasks undertaken by managers would be similar to those they would undertake in organisational contexts. Conversely, one might expect course designs which focus upon broader, developmental philosophies (i.e. reflective of a strategic perspective on conflict handling) to sustain low fidelity, with the aim of achieving transfer via activities which emphasise general constructs, and where the cognitive processing requirements (but not the tasks) share similarity with conflict scenarios in organisations. It is also possible that learning will take longer where declarative designs are used as, with this approach, skill application is less specific and thus

there may be resource implications for the use of one design over another. In short, if the philosophy focuses on the transfer of procedural knowledge, an emphasis on training via high fidelity activities would be expected. In contrast, if OMD courses are based on a theoretical framework which focuses on the transfer of declarative knowledge, low fidelity activities are likely to feature in developing an understanding of broad principles underlying the process of conflict handling. This distinction would also appear to extend to the nature and provision of OMD. Procedurally based courses would appear to benefit from training intact units from one company, thereby optimising the possibility for transfer of procedures learnt to the workplace. In contrast however, declaratively based programmes may be orientated towards a variety of students drawn from different backgrounds. To date however, the literature offers little advice about the ways in which particular course designs might help to speed up the process of skills practice so that the application becomes automatic. There is also a lack of information about the conditions under which the possibilities for learning transfer might be maximised. In both these respects, research in OMD offers little or no guidance as to the optimum approaches, and the associated learning environments which OMD providers should use.

The distinctions highlighted in this section demonstrate that there may be very different design philosophies in operation, each of which has implications for learning and the consequent efficacy of OMD provision. In the outdoors, fidelity may appear to be low as the tasks are unlike those encountered in organisational settings but to what extent are the cognitive processing requirements similar? So, within the present exemplar, how do managers learn the skills of conflict handling and under what circumstances is transfer most likely to occur? Organisations considering the use of the outdoors to help managers develop their skills may therefore wish to ask questions about the OMD provider's philosophy on tactical vs. strategic approaches and about which methodologies are the most effective in achieving transfer. These are crucial questions and ones which to date, have received scant empirical attention. Indeed, the adoption of a clear theoretical paradigm would appear to hold considerable promise for both the research and evolution of this popular approach to personal and/or managerial development. Accordingly, Chapter

Five presents a new framework for analysing the acquisition and transfer of conflict handling skills via OMD.

4.6 Summary

As Chapters Two and Three have demonstrated, there are few evaluative frameworks for skills development in OMD. Consequently, this chapter links the role of knowledge in cognitive skill acquisition to the issue of learning transfer and proposes a way in which different course designs may impact upon learning outcomes. Using skills in conflict handling as an example, the discussion demonstrates that knowledge is a fundamental component of cognitive skills and that essentially, the nature of expertise in skills application is having more knowledge to interpret situations and solve problems. Accordingly, three types of knowledge were identified, (procedural, declarative, tacit) and it was shown how each may be differentially developed via particular course designs. Thus, procedural knowledge is likely to be included in methodologies which emphasise tactical methods of conflict handling, in which the skills are situation specific. Declarative knowledge is likely to feature prominently in programmes which aim to develop strategic approaches, where the skills are broader based and applicable across a range of conflict scenarios. Although far less is known about its development, tacit knowledge may feature in both types of design, as it refers to an aspect of practically intelligent behaviour that is acquired through experience. Indeed, recent work indicates that the development of this kind of knowledge may best be primed by more declaratively orientated approaches.

Subsequently, these ideas are linked to the issue of learning transfer i.e. the degree to which the skills acquired via the outdoor event can be applied in a new setting, usually the workplace. Discussions about transfer have focused around what is called "fidelity" i.e. the extent to which the tasks in the learning environment imitate those in the real life situation. Thus, approaches may highlight, or consciously minimize, the similarities between the outdoor event and the business context in which the learning is to be applied. It should be noted that the literature offers some guidance as to the degree of transfer that can be expected through procedurally or declaratively based schemes. Some theorists have postulated that high fidelity is needed for

transfer and in this view, transfer is the result of closely matching the tasks in the learning domain with those in the application setting. Other researchers have indicated that low fidelity facilitates transfer thus, transfer occurs by increasing similarity between the cognitive processing requirements (but not the tasks) in each situation. Applied to the development of conflict handling skills, course designs which focus on the transfer of procedural knowledge would be expected to utilise high fidelity experiences which focus on situation specific routines for conflict handling. Conversely, if the methodology is based on the transfer of declarative knowledge, low fidelity activities would focus on broad-based approaches to conflict resolution. Indeed, it is possible that a combination of approaches may produce optimum results, but current research in management development offers little guidance about the consequences of particular course designs for learning, or about the circumstances under which transfer is most likely to occur. Thus the adoption of a clear theoretical paradigm (which focuses upon the learning and transfer processes of OMD) appears to offer an important opportunity for this rapidly expanding sector of provision. Consequently, the next chapter summarises the main points of the literature review and presents a new theoretical framework for analysing the learning and transfer of management skills via OMD.

Chapter Five

Summary of the Literature, A Framework for Analysing the Learning and Transfer of Conflict Handling Skills *via* OMD and The Research Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the literature review and allows for the research objectives to be clarified. Subsequently, a new framework is presented for analysing the learning and transfer of conflict handling skills via OMD, and finally there is a consideration of methodological issues pertinent to the research design.

5.2 Outdoor Management Development, Conflict Handling and the Acquisition and Transfer of Cognitive Skills – Messages from the Literature

As Chapter Two has shown, there is a paucity of empirical evidence to support the efficacy of outdoor management development events, both in respect of the learning process and in transfer to business settings. Indeed, the majority of studies to date have focused upon the outcomes of courses and, although this research has helped to expand our understanding of what OMD may achieve, much more empirical investigation is needed to clarify the *mechanisms* of learning (i.e. the methodologies used to effect change) and consequently, the ways in which programmes might maximise the chances of this learning being transferred to the workplace. Lucas (1992) succinctly summarises this point:

> There are as yet, few frameworks offered in the literature concerning the use of the outdoors within manager development. As a relatively new area of study, there are many anecdotal tales of its use, but little analysis based on this activity in practice. (p. 26)

Furthermore, despite the lack of theoretically based models for evaluating the mechanisms of learning in OMD, provision has continued to expand and there are now many courses offering managers the chance to develop a wide range of skills. Thus, a key message emerging from this area of the literature concerns the lack of theoretically based models for evaluating the mechanisms of learning in OMD,

despite the claims made for it in respect of the development of managerial skills and abilities.

In Chapter Three, the development of skills in conflict handling was established as a potential outcome of OMD programmes. It was also suggested that this skill area would provide a useful focus for examining the issue of skills learning and transfer via OMD. In laying the foundation for this particular line of enquiry, the significance of conflict in organisations was explored and the process of conflict handling (i.e. regulating conflict levels to optimum) was highlighted as a key managerial function. Although the literature offers many suggestions about how to manage conflict, there is a lack of information concerning the skills that are crucially required. Whilst a number of studies on conflict management have focused upon *tactical* responses, by concentrating on styles of conflict handling which are situation specific, others have been concerned with general *strategies* which are broader based and applicable across different conflict situations. Implicit in these approaches are different assumptions about the situational nature of conflict management preferences, but these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Thus, although there are many suggestions about how to manage conflict, including accounts which advocate both tactical (specific) and strategic (generic) approaches, there is less consensus about the particular skills, or blend of skills, which managers need. In addition, there is also a lack of empirical evidence about the ways in which such skills are best deployed in business settings. Consequently, an important message emerging from this area of the literature concerns the need to identify and explicitly categorise the skills that managers utilise. It is also suggested that, since the development of conflict handling skills may accrue as one of the outcomes of OMD programmes, further investigation of this skill domain provides a useful focus for investigating the mechanisms of skills development in OMD.

It is clear that many of the skills of conflict handling are applied as a result of human cognition. Accordingly, Chapter Four utilised the literature on cognitive skill acquisition to further analyse skills development in conflict handling. Subsequently, the dialogue suggested a way in which the literature could be applied to demonstrate

how different approaches to OMD may affect learning outcomes. Using the skills of conflict handling as an example, the discussion identified three types of knowledge (procedural, declarative, tacit) and showed how each may be differentially developed via particular course designs. Consideration of these ideas was then linked to the process of learning transfer i.e. the degree to which skills acquired via the outdoor event can be applied to a new setting, usually the workplace. If these ideas were applied to the learning of conflict handling skills *via* OMD, courses which aimed to facilitate the transfer of procedural knowledge would focus upon high fidelity activities which emphasise specific routines for conflict handling. Conversely, if the methodology was based on the transfer of declarative knowledge, low fidelity activities would be expected to feature in developing broad understanding about a range of conflict handling approaches. Indeed, it would appear that a combination of approaches may produce optimum results but the literature reveals a dearth of empirical evidence about the consequences of one particular design over another, or indeed, about those circumstances under which transfer is most likely to occur. Accordingly, it was proposed that, despite the lack of empirical work in this area, adoption of a clear, theoretically derived framework would provide a useful foundation for analysing different approaches to the design of OMD programmes.

5.3 Clarification of Research Objectives

The literature reviewed in Chapters Two to Four revealed a number of key themes. Firstly, there is a lack of information concerning the efficacy of OMD programmes in respect of skills development and transfer. Most of the existing research in this area is concerned with assessing the outcomes of courses rather than investigating the *means* by which these outcomes may be achieved and thus, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support particular approaches to course design. In Chapter Two it was suggested that the skills involved in conflict handling would provide a legitimate focus for further examination of the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer *via* OMD. Further analysis of the literature demonstrated how conflict handling is fundamental to managerial work, but despite the many suggestions about how managers should act to regulate conflict levels (including tactical and strategic approaches), there is a lack of emphasis on the skills which are crucially required.

Consequently, there is a need to explicitly identify and categorise the skills that managers utilise. Finally, since the skills involved in conflict handling are applied as a result of cognitive processes, Chapter Four reviewed the literature on cognitive skill acquisition to glean additional information about the issue of skills development in this domain. As a fundamental component of cognitive skill, the role of knowledge was investigated and hence linked to the problem of learning transfer *via* OMD. Subsequently, it was suggested that different learning outcomes may accrue from manipulating the degree of similarity between the tasks in the learning environment and those in the setting where the learning is to be applied.

In order to provide a structure for investigation of these key issues, a new framework was derived to represent the conduct and implementation of OMD programmes (See Figure 5.1). Once this had been achieved, there was a need to establish the veracity of the concepts contained within it. Thus, in common with an approach based on and evolving from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967), detailed hypotheses were not generated *a priori*. Instead, a number of areas for investigation were outlined, which in turn translated into an overall aim and a number of related objectives. Thus, the overall aim of the research was as follows:

- To develop a framework for analysing the learning and transfer of conflict handling skills *via* OMD.

Consequently, this aim comprised the following six objectives which are subsequently addressed through the five empirical studies reported in Chapters 6-10.

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT HANDLING

1. To identify the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work and to establish whether these are specific or generic in their application **(Study 1; Study 2)**

2. To establish categories of conflict based on managers' experience in business and to compare these categories with those proposed in the literature **(Study 3, objective 2)**.

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT REGULATION

3. To determine the knowledge base (and any underlying factors) influencing managers' decisions in handling conflict **(Study 3, objective 1).**

4. To specify the perceived sources of the skills utilised by managers to deal with conflict at work **(Study 3, objective 3)**.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS IN CONFLICT HANDLING

5. To solicit clients and provider's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD **(Study 4, objectives 1 and 2; Study 5, objective 1).**

6. To identify perceived approaches to learning transfer employed by OMD providers **(Study 4, objective 3; Study 5, objective 2).**

The research design that has been adopted to address these objectives uses a combination of content analysis, in-depth interviews and questionnaires. In common with the approach suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the researcher has adopted a methodological position which is derived from the assumption that theories and models should be grounded in real world observations rather than be governed by established theory, and that theories and models so generated may have some degree of applicability even if they are based on a limited number of cases (Gummesson, 2000). Thus, the research is inductive in that the mechanisms of skill acquisition and transfer will emerge from the data, rather than from previously

formulated hypotheses that are subsequently tested. Thus the primary focus of the thesis is to generate new theory for understanding the mechanisms of OMD.

However, from consideration of the literature in a broad swath of topics, a new potential framework can be delineated for analysing the learning and transfer of conflict handling skills *via* OMD. This apparent dichotomy, namely the need for theory to be grounded in participant's reality WHILST ALSO emerging from pertinent literature, is a tension fundamental to the design of the thesis studies. Accordingly, after the next section which presents this emergent model (building on content from Chapters 2-5), the final sections of this chapter explore the rationale underlying, and approaches involved in, this "mixed" design.

5.4 Towards a New Framework for Analysing the Learning and Transfer of Conflict Handling Skills *via* OMD

This section presents a new framework for analysing skills development and transfer *via* OMD. It is derived primarily from the literature on cognitive skill acquisition and provides a foundation which allows for the research objectives to be addressed. Essentially, the framework represents a new way of evaluating the mechanisms of learning and transfer *via* OMD, an area that has been seriously neglected in the research literature to date. The framework is represented in Figure 5.1.

The framework presented here allows for the ideas in the literature review to be linked so as to produce distinct outcomes in respect of OMD. Thus, it is suggested that procedural knowledge should feature prominently in courses which utilise training approaches to emphasise tactical routines for conflict handling. In contrast, declarative knowledge is more likely to be included in designs employing developmental methodologies to highlight strategic techniques where the skills are applicable across different conflict situations. Consideration of these ideas is then linked to the issue of learning transfer i.e. the degree to which skills acquired via the outdoor event can be applied to a new setting - usually the workplace. Hence, the framework suggests that courses employing procedural approaches (i.e. with an emphasis on tactical, action-based techniques of conflict handling) would sustain high fidelity. Thus, in the learning activities, explicit links could be made with the

workplace in order to promote transfer and the tasks undertaken by managers would be similar to those they would undertake in organisational contexts. Alternatively, designs which utilise declarative approaches (i.e. reflective of a strategic perspective on conflict handling) would be more likely to maintain low fidelity, with the aim of achieving transfer via activities in which the cognitive processes (but not the tasks) share similarities with conflict scenarios in organisations. It should be noted however, that these approaches may not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is possible that a combination of both types of design *may* produce the best results, but current research in OMD offers *no* guidance as to the optimum approach or the associated learning activities that providers should use. Clearly, the underlying philosophy to be followed is a worthwhile consideration for clients and providers alike although, at this stage, it is impossible to say whether declarative or procedural designs are most appropriate for developing particular skills.

In order to examine the veracity of the framework, both as a process and as a representation of the current situation, five studies were completed. These are presented in Chapters 6-10 of the thesis. However, before a detailed report of each of the studies is undertaken, there will be a discussion about methodological issues pertinent to the research designs used.

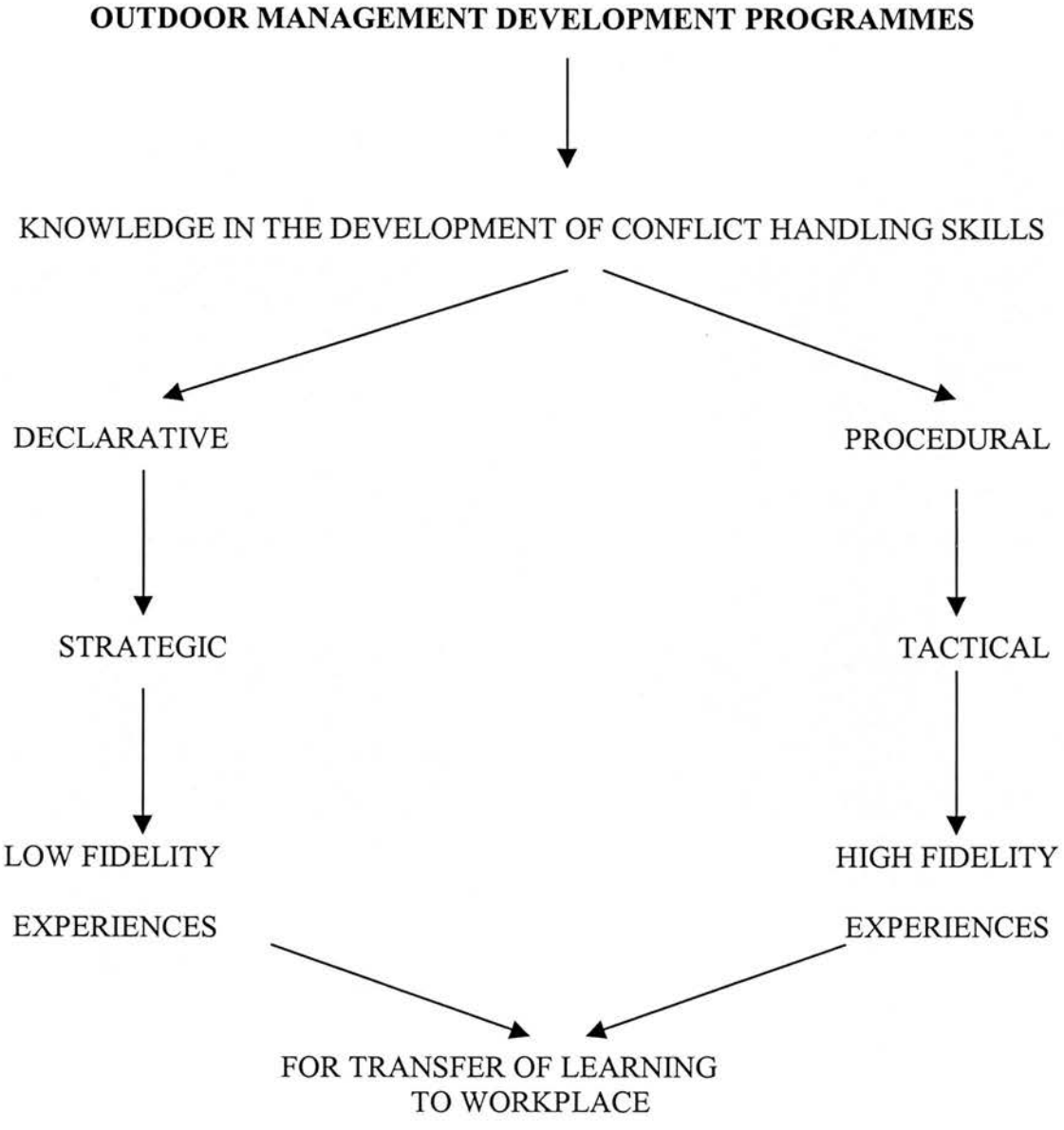


Figure 5.1 A Framework for analysing the Learning and Transfer of Conflict Handling Skills via OMD Programmes

5.5 Introduction to the Research Methodology

The purpose of this section is to develop an appropriate methodology to address the research objectives. This is followed by a description of the chosen methodology and finally, by an overview of the research procedures adopted, including a consideration of ethical issues.

The methodology is the overall framework for the research that governs the data to be collected, the subjects for investigation and the procedures that will be adopted (Frankfort – Nichimas and Nichimas, 1996 cited in Jones, 1998). As the literature review has shown, no coherent path of investigation has been followed in respect of the learning processes of OMD and there is a lack of large-scale research to support the design of programmes. Most of the work to date has been concerned with measuring outcomes rather than exploring the means by which these outcomes may be achieved, and the majority of these investigations have employed quantitative procedures derived principally from quasi - experimental designs (Galpin, 1989; Dendle, 1989; Lucas, 1992). Indeed, although this somewhat limited evidence leads to the conclusion that certain outcomes may accrue from OMD, this does not tell us much about the reasons why this is the case. Although the research to date has gone some way to develop our understanding of OMD, a different emphasis is required to clarify the *mechanisms* of learning (i.e. the processes through which OMD effects change) and consequentially the ways in which programmes might maximise the chances of this learning being transferred to the workplace. Therefore, the framework that has been developed offers a way of evaluating the processes of skills learning and transfer via OMD – a new emphasis in this field of study.

Within the current thesis, there was a need to consider the processes of skills development from both a learning (how it might happen) and a real-life (how providers and clients think it works) perspective. Accordingly, several studies consider the data both inductively and deductively (*c.f.* Pearson, 1988; Scannel, 1990), allowing themes and theories to emerge from the statements of participants, THEN checking these categories against the structures suggested by the literature-based framework. The next sections consider the underlying assumptions, strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approaches utilised, thus offering evidence for the decision making processes and considerations employed.

5.6 The Grounded Theory Approach

The concept of "Grounded Theory" was originally developed as an attempt to close the gap between sociological theory and research in the 1960's. It is defined as a methodology focusing upon the discovery of theory from data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Thus in order to generate theory, the approach is an initial, systematic discovery of theory from the data of social research and as a consequence it is suggested that the theory will work, and apply well in those specific settings. It is also suggested that, since the categories are discovered by examination of the data, practitioners involved in the area to which the theory applies will be able to understand it and researchers who work in other domains will be able to recognise an understandable theory linked to data within that given area. Thus, the rationale for this methodology rests upon the idea that the adequacy of a theory cannot be divorced from the process by which it is generated. Indeed, one of the ideas postulated in support of the grounded theory approach rests on the assumption that one canon for judging the adequacy of theory is how it is generated, rather than how closely pre-determined hypotheses fit with reality. Hence it is likely to be a better theory to the degree that it was inductively developed from social research and thus the ability of a theory to fit and to work is not entirely independent of the process of its generation.

However, in the domain of OMD, research designs built on this foundation are scarce. Many authors, in describing outdoor development, report results that are purely observational and anecdotal in nature, whilst also being limited to one of the participating sides i.e. clients or providers. Crucially, there is virtually no empirical support for understanding the learning process from a holistic perspective. Indeed, it has been observed that many of the empirical studies in this area suffer from serious methodological shortcomings (Gibson, 1979, Hattie *et. al.*, 1997). For example, commenting on the methodologies employed by outdoor development researchers, Hattie *et al.* (1997) observed that:

> The pre-test – post-test study, which dominates the literature, is not unreasonable, but alternative designs could provide alternative sources of control against plausible rival hypotheses. Alternative designs could include time series designs, quasi – or true experimental designs, and qualitative or

> grounded research designs ... research on adventure education can provide many insights which might inform "regular" educational contexts. Adventure programmes have been conducted as if they operated in isolation from the educational world. There is little incorporation of research on group dynamics, attitude change, educational theory and cognitive processes. (p. 77).

Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that more use has not been made of educational theory as a foundation for the design of OMD programmes, especially given the extensive use of Kolb's (1971) learning cycle as a fundamental component. In this respect, the grounded theory approach offers a different way of tackling the problem via a focus upon theory generation which is "grounded" in observation. Thus, the method mirrors the emphasis on experience as a basis for learning, a perspective which is highlighted in much of the educational literature. Another shortcoming of existing studies is the focus upon the summative rather than formative or process aspects of courses. It is critical that such formative studies are part of research programmes that investigate theoretical concerns and processes that lead to positive changes. Indeed, it has been suggested that sound evaluative research is among the most promising routes to finding answers to key questions about the processes which are most successful in adventure programmes (Dainty and Lucas, 1992). As the literature suggests, there are comparatively few qualitative studies focusing upon the process aspects of OMD and this has paved the way for a more determined search for the moderating or process variables involved in, as well as the outcomes from, OMD programmes. Indeed, the suggestion is not that the grounded theory approach is the only method that may be adopted but rather, given the emphasis on the formative aspects of OMD, it is the most appropriate methodology for addressing the research objectives at this comparatively early stage.

Although it originally emanated from sociology, the grounded theory approach has attracted considerable interest from researchers in management areas, presumably because of its potential to generate new insights about the phenomena being studied. As the previous section has shown, grounded theory was developed in order to facilitate its application in daily life by practitioners and thus the practical application of grounded theory requires developing a theory with a minimum of four highly

interrelated properties (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 237). The first requisite property is that the theory must *fit* with the substantive area in which it will be used. Secondly, it must be readily *understandable* by practitioners working in the area. Thirdly, it must be sufficiently *general* so that it can be applied to a multitude of diverse daily situations within the substantive area, not just to one particular situation and finally, it must allow the user partial *control* over the structure and process of daily situations as they change over time. These considerations highlight one of the cornerstones of this methodology – that theories and models should be grounded in real world observations, rather than being governed by established theory (Gummesson, 2000). In this respect, the approach offers a departure from much of the empirical work in OMD. By focussing upon emergent themes and issues, and then checking these categories against those postulated in the literature-based framework, it was hoped that the resultant theory would have relevance to OMD practice and offer flexibility in its application to a range of contexts. Therefore, it was intended that the research would highlight the robustness of the framework in respect of these variables. Thus, the literature review has been used to establish the research gap and to unearth a framework for analysis, the validity of which will be established in the research of later chapters.

Many of the studies in social research show an emphasis on the verification of theory and a resultant de–emphasis on the prior stage of discovering concepts and hypotheses that are relevant to the area under investigation (Martens 1979, Parry, 1985). Accordingly, if the framework is going be relevant to the design of OMD programmes, the researcher must have a fundamental knowledge of the studied industry and its actors and concentrate on processes likely to lead to understanding – *Verstehen* – rather than conducting a search for casual explanations (Kjellen, Bengt and Soderman, 1980) alone. Thus, the grounded theory approach is appropriate for deriving constructs directly from the immediate data that has been collected rather than from prior research and theory. In other words, the constructs will be "grounded" in the particular set of data that the researcher has collected and this allows for the usefulness of the constructs to be tested in subsequent research. Once again, this methodology offers advantages for OMD research because of the focus upon theory generation rather than theory testing. Unlike purely deductive designs,

theories so generated are the result of data gathered from practical experiences within the substantive area. Consequently, the theory ought to fit with, and transfer more readily between, a range of OMD contexts within the obvious limitations associated with a qualitative-style approach.

5.7 Qualitative and Quantitative Features of the Research Methodology

There is a large body of theory concerning the relative merits or qualitative and quantitative methodologies and it is not the intention to discuss these at length here. However, it is important that the main differences are accounted for in the research design as the methods used must be appropriate to the area under investigation (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). The grounded theory approach allows for theory generation using both qualitative and quantitative methods because the process of generating theory is independent of the kind of data used (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Within this thesis, the adopted research methodology is primarily qualitative, with some quantitative features included in the final fieldwork phase. Thus, studies 1-4 focus upon the gathering of rich data from a variety of contexts whilst the final study provides a first step towards assessing the genericity of the framework to a wider population. This approach is consistent with the notion that there is no fundamental clash between the capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods as it is the process of theory generation that is central to the approach, rather than the procedures employed in data collection.

The research design is intended to generate a body of data to enable discussion to take place on extending the theory of skills learning and transfer via OMD. Section 5.5 highlighted the lack of empirical research in respect of the learning mechanisms of OMD, despite the existence of a reasonable amount of outcome driven work. Most of these projects have involved one–off studies using before and after comparisons and ignoring interesting independent variables such as length, instructor experience and the differences between programmes (Hattie, *et. al.*, 1997). In many of these studies, the differences between pre-test and post-test have not been statistically significant but the authors have claimed that the effect is "most obvious" (ibid. p. 75). Indeed, if the aim was to assess the skills that are acquired via OMD, a logical

procedure might involve generating behavioural measures of skill application by studying managers' behaviour pre and post training to examine possible changes and, in this kind of study, the emphasis would be on examining the nature of the learned skills - not the mechanisms whereby they are acquired or indeed transferred into work settings. However, studies which focus explicitly on the mechanisms of learning via OMD are rare; it also seems reasonable to suggest that the outdoor experience is a holistic one for many participants, involving a particular quality of experience which may impact upon other aspects their lives (Gunter, 1987). Thus, there are likely to be opportunities for assessment and reassessment of approaches and behaviours and it is perhaps not surprising that some evaluators sense major change but are unable to show statistical significance. The "mixed methods" approach has not been utilised in any of the major empirical studies on OMD, except as a part of the pre-test – post-test strategy (Lucas, 1992; Galpin, 1989). Accordingly, the proposed research design is intended to capitalise on the diversity of programmes and reduce the pitfalls associated with using one–off studies.

Qualitative Features of the Research Design

Qualitative research designs typically focus upon the "essence" of a phenomenon and the objectives are primarily description, understanding and meaning (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). Thus, the researcher does not manipulate variables using experimental procedures but rather is interested more in processes than in outcomes. Qualitative research is characterised by inductive rather then deductive investigation and the researcher is usually the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Qualitative data are characterised by their richness and fullness based on the opportunity to explore a subject in as real a manner as possible (Robson, 1993). Typically, qualitative methodologies involve the use of interviews to gather information that is not directly observable and thus, data collection will typically focus upon the feelings, attitudes, motivations and experiences of individuals (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). One of the major advantages of the interview technique is its adaptability. Interviews allow the researcher to follow up on particular comments by clarifying vague or ambiguous statements with respondents. In addition, a greater degree of rapport and trust is likely to be established than would be the case with

other data collection methods and consequently, it may be possible to obtain additional information (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). Qualitative methodologies are therefore appropriate to achieve an in–depth, rather than a broad knowledge of a particular situation or phenomenon. Accordingly, the adoption of a qualitative methodology has the following advantages for assessing the applicability of the framework to OMD provision:

- Qualitative methodologies allow for in-depth information to be gathered concerning managers' experiences of conflict at work and the kinds of knowledge and skills that are utilised.
- Qualitative approaches are appropriate for investigating the nature of OMD provision for knowledge and skills development in conflict handling.
- Qualitative methodologies enable respondents to introduce, clarify and elaborate on particular points of information, thereby enabling flexibility in the data collection process.
- Qualitative approaches facilitate reflective answers which may involve diverse information gathered over a period of time unlike quantitative methodologies which tend to concentrate upon meanings derived from numerical or standardised data.

There are however, some disadvantages to qualitative research designs which are well documented in the literature (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Thomas and Nelson, 1990). One of the main concerns is the issue of validity – i.e. whether theories and models that purport to have some degree of general applicability can be based on a limited number of cases. Glaser and Strauss (1967) postulate that:

> Since accurate evidence is not so crucial for generating theory, the kind of evidence, as well as the number of cases, is also not so crucial. A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the indication. (p. 30)

In order to establish the number of cases needed, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest the use of comparison – that is, to choose cases that represent different aspects of reality. This process involves the researcher in a data collection process where

information is gathered, coded and systematically organised prior to deciding what to collect next and where it may be found. In adopting this approach, the researcher will need a competent level of knowledge about the area to be investigated and a desire to search for and recognise meanings in the data which can then be compared with existing theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Quantitative Features of the Research Design

Quantitative methodologies typically involve precise measurements, rigid control of variables and statistical analyses (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). Consequently, quantitative approaches tend to include the examination of components of a phenomenon using large, random or representative samples as a basis for deduction. Quantitative methodologies also allow for data collection across large subject samples and for the incidence of particular phenomena to be measured. The researcher usually attempts to keep out of the data collection process by the use of laboratory techniques, questionnaires or other, often purported objective measures. Questionnaires are documents that ask the same questions to all individuals in the sample. Typically, respondents record a written response to each questionnaire item and usually exercise a fair degree of control over the data collection process. They can fill out the questionnaire at their convenience, take one or more sittings to complete it, make marginal comments or give unique responses (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). Questionnaires have two main advantages over interviews for data collection. Firstly, the relative cost of sampling a large number of respondents is typically much less; and secondly, the time required to reach the respondents over a wide geographical area is lower. The advantages of using a quantitative methodology in the present research design were as follows:

- Quantitative methodologies are appropriate for determining managers' opinions about the kinds of skills they have acquired via OMD courses and the ways in which these are applied.
- Quantitative approaches enable the degree of "fit" to be assessed between provision for skills development in OMD and the skills that are used by managers to deal with conflict at work.
- Quantitative methodologies allow for the relationship between OMD methodology and skills transfer to be investigated.

There are, however, some disadvantages to using quantitative methodologies. Questionnaires cannot probe deeply into respondent's feelings or perceptions and once they have been distributed, it is not possible to amend the items. Questionnaire responses also measure what people say they do or like, and there are typically no opportunities to probe or clarify these reactions (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). In addition, the validity and reliability of the data collected and the response rates that are achieved depend, to a large extent, on the design of the questions, the structure of the questionnaire and the rigour of the pilot testing. A valid question will enable accurate data to be collected while one which is reliable will mean that these data are collected consistently (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000). Foddy (1994) discusses this in terms of the questions and answers 'making sense', so that "the question must be understood by the respondent in the way intended by the researcher and the answer given by the respondent must be understood by the researcher in the way intended by the respondent" (p. 17). Thus, from the outset, there must be clarity about the questions to be asked and the respondent must accurately decode these meanings. Once the answers have been given, it is the job of the researcher to understand the responses in the way that was intended.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Mixed Method approach for OMD Research

It is suggested that the use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies will enable the strengths of both to be utilised (Smith, 1975). Thus, the mixed methods approach

allows for a degree of generalizability alongside attention to the individual case (Argyris, Putnam and McLain Smith, 1985). Typically, the choice of which methods to use will affect the results obtained but it is difficult to ascertain the nature of this interaction. Therefore it makes sense to use different methods to cancel out the "method effect" as much as possible and increase the chances of the research findings being credible (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000). This idea is aptly summarised by Rogers (1961): "Scientific methodology needs to be seen for what it truly is, a way or preventing me from deceiving myself in regard of my creatively formed subjective hunches which have developed out of the relationship between me and my material" (cited in Raimond 1993 p. 55).

The mixed methods approach also facilitates t*riangulation.* Triangulation refers to the use of different data collection methods within one study to ensure that the data are telling an accurate story. Even though this approach is typically applied intra-investigation, the advantages accruing from it can nonetheless be realised in the overall research design. Thus, content analysis (Study 1) and semi-structured interviews (Studies 2-4) are used as a means of triangulating data collected via questionnaires (Study 5) and, in common with the approach suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2000), these research methods are used for different purposes. Interviews are used to allow for key themes to emerge and to establish a feel for the data, and questionnaires are used as a means to ascertain the applicability of these data to wider contexts. In this way, the mixed methods approach helps to establish a "check" that the most important issues are being addressed. In summary, the mixed methods approach has the following advantages for the research design:

- Qualitative methods allow for theory to emerge from real world data in common with the grounded theory approach.
- Qualitative analysis permits the researcher to probe deeply into managers' experiences of conflict at work and to ascertain the underlying reasons for particular approaches
- Qualitative methods enable OMD providers to elaborate upon the rationale for the adoption of specific methodologies in respect of skills development and transfer.
- Qualitative methods make it possible for a "working theory" or holistic picture to emerge of the processes of OMD provision. Fundamentally, this allows the researcher to ask "what are the variables involved?" prior to conducting further analysis to test the incidence of these variables amongst a wider population.
- The use of a Quantitative methodology facilitates data collection from a larger sample than would be feasible using qualitative methods and this approach permits the researcher to establish how frequent certain phenomena may be amongst managers who have attended a variety of OMD courses. Thus, excessive reliance on "one – off" cases is avoided.
- Open - ended questions used as a part of a quantitative methodology help to minimise the problem of "interview bias" - where the interviewer may be perceived as leading the respondent towards the right answer.
- Quantitative analysis helps to establish a further "check" on the accuracy of the variables that have been identified and this process enables the foundation to be laid for future testing of the qualitative phenomena identified in earlier stages of the research.
- The mixed methods approach is methodologically appealing, since it allows for a coherent path of investigation of the mechanisms of OMD. Thus, Studies 1-4 assess the ecological validity of the concepts prior to Study 5, which examines the incidence of these variables amongst the managerial population. Study 5 also allows for the relationships between variables to be verified and this strategy may help to maximise the applicability of the framework for OMD practitioners and business organisations.

Each research method has its unique strengths and weaknesses (Smith, 1975). The main weaknesses of the mixed methods approach relates to the disadvantages of each individual method (detailed in the previous sections), and the possibility of diluting a more focused research design which utilises only one main method. However, it is hoped that the qualitative and quantitative features *in combination* will strengthen the research strategy so that greater confidence can be placed in the conclusions. In addition, the use of different methods for different purposes helps to provide reassurance that the pertinent issues are being addressed.

5.8 Validity, Reliability and Delimitations

All types of research must address the concepts of validity and reliability (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). V*alidity* is seen as a continuous process in which the researcher constantly refines and readjusts key assumptions, revises results, re – tests models and reassesses the constructs of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Merriam (1988) has stated that the issue of *internal validity* addresses the question of how one's findings match reality. In other words, do the findings capture what is really there? Glaser and Strauss, (1967) have argued that the presentation of grounded theory allows for theory development which can be applied and adjusted to many situations with sufficient exactitude to guide thinking, understanding and research. However, there are also potential problems:

> This process of validation places great demand on the researcher. Inadequate research can easily result from a lack of clearly defined principles and rules for validation processes of this type. Hence, a more open discussion of the weaknesses surrounding a particular approach, its results etc. will help to improve the quality of this process of validation. (Gummesson, 2000 p. 93).

The problem of internal validity is addressed in this research through a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the methods adopted within the research design, and by careful documentation of the processes and procedures for each study. Consensus validation techniques are also used to enable involvement of more than one researcher in drawing inferences from the data collected.

The issue of *external validity* concerns the generalisability of the results to other similar contexts. Qualitative research has often been criticised because of the small number of subjects and lack of random sampling which are often a feature of such designs. However, Erickson (1986) has suggested that generalisable knowledge is inappropriate for qualitative studies and that the researcher should concentrate on the generation of "concrete universals" which are generated through field work of specific cases and then compared against the specifics of other similar cases. In this way, the learning generated from one case is transferable to another. Accordingly, the adopted research design incorporates five distinct studies which focus upon different contexts in order to assess the applicability of the framework to OMD. It has also been suggested that the issue of generalisability may be addressed by "user validation". Thus, the user of the research evaluates which aspects of the findings apply to her situation and which do not (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). In a similar vein, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) use the term "transferability" to refer to the extent to which the qualitative researcher communicates the key concepts, procedures and analyses in a way that may be understood and replicated by researchers working in similar fields. As Glaser and Strauss observe, in grounded theory approaches:

> The systematic analysis permits a field worker quite literally to write prescriptions so that other outsiders could get along in the observed sphere of life and action. That is one benefit of a substantive theory. If he has "made out" within the particular social world by following these prescriptions, then presumably, they accurately represent the world's prominent features; they are workable guides to action and therefore their credibility can, on this account too, be accorded our confidence (1967 p. 227).

In grounded theory approaches, "theoretical sampling" is used to collect data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is a continuous process where the researcher simultaneously compiles, codes and analyses data and then decides what to collect next and where it may be found. The cases are then compared, and the similarities and differences noted. The requisite number of cases is determined by the concept of "saturation", that is the diminishing contribution of each additional case. Thus, the researcher will have no need to seek additional cases when their contribution approaches zero (Gummesson, 2000). Thus, throughout the fieldwork phase, there is a continuous process of evaluation which determines what data are to be collected next, in line

with each of the research objectives. The problem of generalisation can also be extended to include a consideration of the extent to which it is desirable to generalise. For example, Gustaven and Sorenson (1982) have placed considerable emphasis on the generation of "local" theory, which includes knowledge that is generalisable to a particular situation or context (cited in Gummesson, 2000 p. 96). Cronbach states that "when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion" (cited in Patton, 1980 p. 280). In a similar vein, Argyris *et. al.* (1985) seek generalisability and attention to the individual case (p. 84). The mixing of methods within the overall research design makes it possible to assess the applicability of the framework – both to individual programme designs and more generally, to OMD provision.

Gummesson (2000) has suggested four criteria for assessing validity and generalizability in qualitative research. These are: 1) To what areas the results apply, 2) how closely the research represents the phenomenon that the researcher aimed to study 3) if other research confirms or disconfirms the findings and 4) if results bear out or contradict extant research (p. 187). However, although these criteria are useful as a checklist, they are not intended to universally apply, or to assume the same importance in every type of research design. Arguably, theories of management are frequently validated through actions and thus new conceptual developments in marketing for example, have been grounded in empirical data gathered from real life settings. This is in contrast to the testing of the traditional consumer "marketing mix" theory, which was a mainstream focus for marketing research. Hence, different approaches to the collection and assembly of data have yielded new insights and this is a key tenet of the grounded theory approach which emphasises the importance of theory in its accuracy of "fit" and relevance to the area it purports to explain. For this research, it is hoped that the results will generate theory to verify or otherwise refute the concepts represented in the framework. This process allows for an assessment of its applicability in relation to OMD provision and more generally, to the mechanisms of skills learning and development. The use of a literature base (and identified research gaps) helps to link the framework closely to the phenomenon under

investigation and this feature also assists in addressing the problems of validity and generalisability within the overall research design.

Reliability ensures that two or more researchers studying the same phenomenon with similar purposes would be able to reach approximately the same results. A study with high reliability should be able to be replicated by others. Gummesson (2000) states that the three main functions of reliability are to maintain the "truth" of the research, to establish a check on whether the findings are logical, and as a substitute for validity when validity seems beyond reach; thus the researcher establishes reliability and assumes validity (p. 91).

Delimitations refers to the planned, justified scope of the study, beyond which generalisation of the result was not intended. Kroll (1971) has described delimitations as choices the experimenter makes to effect a workable research problem, such as the choice of particular research methods or restricting the selection of subjects to a certain number of cases. Thus, the researcher delimits the study and must therefore proceed on the assumption that the imposed restrictions will not be so confining as to destroy the external validity or generalisability of the results. This issue is addressed in the thesis by reference to the rationale for each of the fieldwork phases, including justification for selection of respondents and discussion of specific objectives for each study. The problem is also tackled in an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the methods used as part of the overall research strategy. In addition, the framework also facilitates a "check" on the scope of the research problem as the fieldwork progresses and provides a useful point of reference for the assessment of progress against objectives.

Finally, it is evident that one of the criticisms of qualitative research has been that it does not fulfil the criteria of validity and reliability in the traditional sense. In fact, Kirk and Miller (1986) have stated that because qualitative research is based on different assumptions about reality and uses a different paradigm than quantitative research there should be alternative interpretations of validity and reliability. To the qualitative researcher, reality is observed to be holistic, fluid and multi-dimensional,

rather than a permanent, constant phenomenon waiting to be discovered (Merriam, 1988). Indeed, it is precisely this approach that underpins the use of grounded theory as part of the research strategy. Crucially, one of the marked weaknesses in much of the OMD research to date has concerned precisely this issue, namely the lack of a holistic approach which probes deeply into the nature of participants and tutors' perceptions of the experience. In quantitative methodologies, where methods typically involve precise measurements, rigid control of variables and statistical analyses, the mechanisms of validity and reliability are different to those employed in qualitative research designs where data are gathered about attitudes, values and meanings. Thus, the researcher should take into account other concepts such as credibility and authenticity of the findings (Gall *et al.*, 1996).

5.9 Summary

Once the choice of the grounded theory approach has been determined, the research design should be planned (Yin, 1994). Figure 1.1 outlined the stages of the primary research methodology which allows for data collection via three research methods. These are:

- Content analysis of management development brochures (Study One)
- The semi – structured interview (Studies Two, Three and Four)
- The questionnaire survey (Study Five)

The research design includes a number of phases integrated into an overall strategy for testing the framework. It is important that the research strategy is appropriate to enable these phases to produce an integrated piece of research which will address the aims and objectives that have been identified (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000). In common with the grounded theory approach, data collection proceeds in tandem with the exploration of emergent themes and issues (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Robson, 1993, Strauss and Corbin 1998). Thus, a key tenet of the overall research strategy is constant reference to the data to develop and test theory (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). The grounded theory methodology has often been referred to as clear example of "theory building" through a combination of induction and deduction (Yin, 1994). Accordingly, the process of data collection leads to the generation of

predictions that are analysed in further observations which may confirm, or otherwise refute, these predictions.

Data were collected through five studies which are reported in Chapters 6-10 respectively. Study 1 begins by investigating the extent to which generic and specific approaches are utilised in management development provision whilst Studies 2 and 3 are concerned with clarifying the knowledge and skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work. Study 4 samples OMD providers to establish perceived provision for conflict handling including approaches to learning transfer and Study 5 investigates the nature of the relationship between OMD methodology and the learning transfer process. On these foundations, the discussion can now proceed with a detailed description of each of the studies undertaken. Accordingly, Study 1 is outlined in chapter 6, followed by Studies 2-5 in Chapters 7-10.

Chapter Six

Study One - Content Analysis of Management Development Brochures

6.1 Introduction

Once the research methodology had been determined, the next stage was to begin the process of data collection. The framework that emerged from the literature enabled a number of variables to be linked together in order to construct two possible design routes for skills development *via* OMD. The declarative route is linked to broader based approaches, focusing upon programme designs which facilitate the development of strategic skills using low fidelity activities. Alternatively, the procedural approach is somewhat more specific, with the objective of achieving transfer *via* high fidelity methodologies (see Figure 5.1).

6.2 Aims and Objectives

In accordance with the structure outlined in Chapter One, the fieldwork phases explored three key components of conflict handling – namely the nature of conflict handling (Studies 1,2, and 3), the process through which conflict levels are optimised (Study 3) and the development of conflict handling skills (Studies 4 and 5).

Accordingly, the focus of this first study was to assess the initial applicability of the framework in relation to management development provision. Thus, in line with a focus upon the nature of conflict handling, the following objective was formulated:

- To determine the extent to which management development providers employ declarative or procedural designs in respect of knowledge and skills development.

Thus, the purpose of this initial study was to scrutinise provider's documentation in order to ascertain whether the proposed framework (and obviously the philosophy

underpinning it) was reflected in the kinds of programmes offered (Burke and Collins, 1998).

6.3 Method

A content analysis of brochures produced by providers of management development in the U.K. was conducted to establish emergent themes, and to assess the extent to which procedural and declarative designs were evident. A request for information was sent to 30 providers of management development, selected from The Management Development Yearbook (1985) (n=60). The intention was to obtain brochures from a representative range of providers in order to develop an overall picture of how different areas of provision addressed the issue of skills development. Thus, the "purposeful" sample included the larger providers as well as the smaller, and somewhat less well - established organisations. Requests were sent to 15 providers with a record of contracted services to large organisations (category 1) and 15 others, with a less well - established client base (category 2). In order to qualify as category 1, providers must have been in the business of management development for more than two years, have a minimum of five employees working for them on a regular basis and posses a track record of contracted services to a range of organisations. All other providers were assigned to category 2. Once each provider had been allocated to a category, each was assigned a number which was subsequently entered into *SPSS for Windows* 9.0 (Chicago, USA). A random sampling of these data produced the final 15 clients in each category. Content analysis was completed on 22 courses. Replies were received from the following providers:

<u>Category 1:</u>

The Institute of Management
Sundridge Park Management School
Bradford Management Centre
Cranfield University School of Management
The Civil Service College
Ashridge Management School

Category 2:

Guardian Business Services

Performance Seminars

Career Track International

Fred Pryor Seminars

Perhaps unsurprisingly, more replies were received from the larger providers. Thus it was acknowledged that the method of purposeful sampling may have rendered systematic bias towards such organisations. However, the fact that well-established organisations were used also offered the best chance to ascertain the robustness of the framework against a wide range of course provision.

The content analysis was used as a means to complement other methods utilised within the research and to provide a foundation for studies 2-5. The process involved the researcher becoming completely familiar with the material, and then initially using inductive content analysis procedures (*c.f.* Gould, Finch and Jackson, 1993) in order to categorise the information according to emergent themes. Subsequently these were checked against categories suggested by the framework to determine whether courses were systematically declaratively orientated, procedurally based, or both. To remove potential analyst bias in both stages, consensus validation procedures were used to select quotes and to identify categories (Scanlan, Stein and Ravissa, 1991). Hence, two experienced investigators with a background in qualitative research were recruited to analyse the data. The inclusion of several researchers to come to a consensus on the coding of data has been considered to be a species of trangulation (Gould, Eklund and Jackson, 1993) but there has been some criticism of this approach (Krane, Anderson and Strean, 1997). Indeed, it has been suggested that multiple researchers with similar viewpoints may actually be magnifying the subjectivity, rather than decreasing it and that it may be preferable for a research partner to act as "devils advocate" to critically question the coding and analysis. Accordingly, a continuous process of consensus validation and critical analysis was more fitting to the suggested approach because it allowed for the

different views of researchers to be taken into account as well as facilitating critical debate about interpretation of the data.

6.4 Results

The content analysis revealed a variety of offerings. The avoidance of a pre determined deductive path was related to the need to search for and recognise meanings in the data and hence, the use of this approach allowed for comparisons between existing theory and "grounded" explanations, once these had emerged.

To begin with, courses varied considerably in the extent to which they employed an organisational or individual focus. Some programmes were tailored "in – company" and dealt with strategic issues such as managing change or the development of managerial competencies, whilst others utilised an individual focus - developing specialist skills or managerial functions. These programmes offered help with specific management roles and were run in house as well as externally. The course content revealed the use of both declarative and procedural schemes, with some providers using a combination. Accordingly, the inductive analysis rendered course designs subsequently categorised under four main headings, namely "declarative", "procedural", "both" and "neither". Since these categories emerged from the data before labelling took place, they were taken to the represent the various approaches to skills development adopted by providers. Following this phase, a deductive approach was utilised to identify the characteristics of courses against the four categories that had emerged. The results from this analysis revealed methodologies that were consistent with each of the four categories that had previously emerged and these findings were therefore compatible with the design paths represented in the framework.

1. Declarative Designs

Declarative designs were evident in descriptions offering help with broader issues and the development of generic skills which may be applied across different situations. A course from The Institute of Management included the following information:

> The overall aim is to enable participants to achieve results through other people by using effective interpersonal skills. By the end of the workshop you will have identified and practised the key interpersonal skills of listening, questioning, supportive behaviour, self disclosure and giving feedback...be able to make informed choices about the different behaviour options you have available... have considered your own conflict handling style(s) and have assessed the impact of these on other people (1999 p. 13).

The "Managing Client Relations" programme at Cranfield employed a similar approach:

> Who should attend?...Those people whose role requires them to work across the organisation's boundaries directly with customers, clients, other professionals, suppliers or the media...Participants will gain an in-depth understanding of the impact they have on clients and how personal blocks to effectiveness may be overcome...they will...increase their knowledge, skills and confidence to manage beyond their organisation's boundaries (1998 p. 50).

Further evidence of a declarative philosophy was to be found in the Sundridge Park Brochure:

> The programme is highly appropriate for male and female executives who have moved or wish to move into general management. It is of equal benefit to those functional managers who realise the imperative of a broader understanding beyond their own specialism (1994 p. 6).

In a similar vein, a course on "The Integrated Manager" identified the following learning objectives: "This is a unique personal development programme which enables managers to act with greater initiative, self confidence, self determination and integrity. It incorporates activities and exercises both indoors and in the outdoors" (Cranfield University, 1998 p.55). Indeed, there were numerous examples of broader based approaches in the course material and this was not confined to programmes where strategic objectives featured strongly. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this philosophical perspective came from a "Business Leadership" programme, run by Ashridge:

> You will develop behavioural skill and strategies within a supportive but challenging environment, build a framework and network to maintain continuous learning for the future and increase your effectiveness and confidence in using a variety of leadership styles and skills, giving you a greater impact in your workplace (1998 p. 21).

2. Procedural Designs

In contrast, procedural philosophies were evident in descriptions which emphasised progressive or staged approaches, moving managers towards focused outcomes. A programme by Guardian Business Services offered the following information:

> This 2 day course identifies the steps involved in making swift and informed choices. Delegates will be presented with a 5 stage model which will help them to analyse the situation, develop appropriate selection criteria, choose between people, assess the match and mismatch between the chosen person and the task and anticipate the consequences of their choice. Decision making tools and methods will be developed. Extensive use will be made of simulations, case studies and syndicate discussion to develop the speed and quality of choices (1992-3 p.1).

Other programmes from this philosophical perspective aimed to develop particular skills or functions which were situation specific: "This course offers practical training in the essential skills required for planning and then conducting negotiations with trades unions" (Bradford Management Centre 1993 p.27).

From a similar viewpoint, a Fred Pryor Seminars programme offered the following rationale:

> Here are 32 powerful skills that will be yours to use after attending this workshop!...Know the three most effective approaches to adopt with inconsiderate, discourteous or offensive people... Follow a proven tactic to make people want to deal with you and try again, even if the encounter did not go well...Get a five step method for reaching a compromise that leaves both parties feeling like winners (1996 p. 5).

In a similar vein, a course on "How to Discipline Employees and Correct Performance Problems" included this description:

> Do you recognise these problem employees...The "bad attitudes"... "the unskilled"... "the misdirected?" At this seminar, you will learn how to distinguish between the types of problem employees. You will learn the hidden causes behind their difficult behaviour. You will learn how to deal with each one carefully and compassionately (CareerTrack International, 1999 p. 2).

The course also promised

> ...six factors to consider when choosing corrective measures, seven signs that your problem employee needs more training and specific steps for handling employees who have a bad attitude, are chronically tardy, are frequently absent from work, say "I don't know" when confronted, challenge your authority or are derailed by personal problems (p.3).

3. Combinations of Declarative and Procedural Designs

There were also a number of examples where both approaches were used in combination. In these instances, the learning involved specific and generic application, whereby general competencies were included alongside the more focused skill areas. A seminar on "How To Manage Anger, Conflict and Emotion" was based around the following rationale:

> Control, confidence and composure in even the most highly charged situations...Three special situations where you should avoid a confrontation at all costs!... Steps you can take right now to "repair" relationships damaged by past conflicts!...Start communication through conflict to resolve disagreements. You'll get your point across without losing your cool - and people will really listen to what you're trying to say! Start getting what's important to you without having to fight for it! You'll discover how to resolve conflicts without winners or losers...how to forge a compromise you can live with ...how to transform competitiveness into co-operation...it's all easy to do if you employ several workable techniques to communicate through a conflict (Fred Pryor Seminars, 1997 p.3).

A similar approach was evident from other providers. A programme titled "Personal Power and Influencing Skills" included content pertaining to both specific and generic skills application:

> On completion you should have improved your skills in managing the relationship between yourself and your primary work group and how you and

> they interact with other groups. The individuals and the groups you manage will be better able to develop to their full potential and contribute to a culture in which positive influencing facilitates the delivery of desired results (Civil Service College, 1999 – 2000 p. 37).

An "Employee Relations" programme at Cranfield also emphasised a combination of skills acquisition and implementation in diverse contexts:

> This programme looks at the practical skills required for effective negotiations at work. Most managers need to use these skills in dealing with individual and collective issues, particularly as national negotiations are often devolved to non-specialist managers at the enterprise level. The programme is unique in that it is run jointly with major trades unions so that managers experience the reality of dealing with experienced grievance, discipline and mediation specialists from the other side of the table (1998 p. 59).

In a similar vein, general competencies featured alongside more specific skill areas in an Advanced Negotiating Skills course offered by The Institute of Management. The programme included specific content on "negotiation roles and higher level skills" and "strategies, tactics and behaviours best avoided", alongside the following generic material:

> You will plan negotiation situations and apply persuasive communication skills in difficult situations, analyse your own negotiation skills using a formal framework, apply behavioural principles to develop effective negotiation styles and recognise opponent's tactics and strategies and deal effectively with them (1999 p. 74).

4. Courses not offering Declarative or Procedural designs

The final category included courses which did not appear to employ any particular focus in respect of declarative or procedural designs. Thus there was no evidence of an orientation towards the development of either generic or specific skills, despite a course rationale suggesting skills development. A course titled "How to Lead a Team" promised participants the opportunity to "learn the skills considered most critical by experienced team leaders". This course included "critical skills" such as "starting off on the right foot with a new team", "making sure team meetings are

worthwhile – and not just a time wasting experience", and "knowing the best places to invest your time for the biggest reward" (CareerTrack International, 1999 p. 2).

In a similar vein, a course on "Dealing successfully with difficult people" included the following: "Pick up proven "power" words that establish you as confident and in control of every situation" and "in this one day, informative workshop, you'll discover why each difficult person acts to type. You'll get the secrets to dealing with them that common sense just doesn't tell you. You'll be surprised to learn how just the right word can change the situation" (Performance Seminars, 1996 p. 2).

6.5 Discussion

Objective: To determine the extent to which management development providers employ declarative or procedural designs in respect of knowledge and skills development.

Thus, on the basis of this preliminary analysis it would appear that managers are offered a variety of development opportunities based around programme designs which support the development of either declarative or procedural knowledge, or both, sometimes evidenced in combination. In addition, the findings revealed a number of programme designs which did not appear to be orientated towards any of these categories.

Although these data suggested the existence of four primary approaches, there was much greater variability in the methodologies explicitly linked to these outcomes. Thus, although a variety of aims were stated, there was a lack of clarity about the linkage between these aims and the methods employed. There was also less consistency about the rationale underpinning the use of particular designs to promote skills development. Thus, from these results at least, it was difficult to establish the connection between the adopted methodology and the outcomes that may, or that were intended to, accrue.

In considering the nature of provision for conflict handling, the results of this study demonstrate that the declarative / procedural continuum may exist insofar as

providers of management development utilise both types of approach – both singularly and in combination in the stated aims of their portfolios. It was also evident that some designs had none of these characteristics and from these examples, it was difficult to glean the underlying philosophy in respect of knowledge and skills development.

Thus, it may be that a combination of methodologies offers the best way to facilitate the development of important managerial skills such as conflict handling, although the existence of courses which did not employ any of the approaches outlined above also raises issues which merit further consideration. One interesting question concerns the essential integration between knowledge and skills. Why was it not possible to identify one of the three knowledge types (i.e. declarative, procedural, tacit) as features of such provision? If the development of knowledge is not regarded as essential for skills development in these contexts then there may be serious implications for the efficacy of such provision, given the clear linkage between knowledge acquisition and skills application documented in several areas of the literature (Deutsch, 1994; Allard, 1993).

Given these considerations, it is possible that a combination of declarative and procedural approaches may offer the "best of both worlds", as this type of design would allow for the development of both strategic and tactical skill development. Indeed, it is likely that organisations would require personnel with abilities to apply both, especially given the global nature of the current business environment. Thus the content analysis provides reasonable evidence for the veracity (or at least the face validity) of the framework insofar as the aims and objectives of courses are concerned. Indeed, the courses which did not appear to utilise any identifiable approach (i.e. neither declarative nor procedural) were all from the second category of smaller, less well-established providers. Perhaps this group do not have the time nor the inclination to think through such issues? This contention is further supported by the clustering of course philosophy by provider. It was not possible to conduct a full analysis by provider rather than course, due to extreme variability in the methodologies and outcomes offered. However, it was interesting to note that the

larger providers (in category 1) were associated primarily with declarative designs (Institute of Management, Cranfield, Sundridge Park, Ashridge), or designs involving both declarative and procedural approaches (Civil Service College, Institute of Management, Cranfield). All of the providers who did not appear to subscribe to any particular philosophy (i.e. neither declarative nor procedural) came from the second category of smaller organisations with a less well-established client base.

Although at one level, the results demonstrate consistency with the framework, there was less clarity about the rationale for the adoption of one approach over another. Thus there was no evidence to support the application of underlying principles to guide the design and implementation of programmes. Thus although it was evident that providers adopted one of four basic designs, it was not clear why. Arguably, it may not be advantageous to have "the best of both worlds" (i.e. declarative and procedural) if there is no clearly articulated philosophy underpinning the approach.

The distinctions outlined above appear to indicate the presence of different design philosophies, each of which may have implications for learning and subsequent skills transfer (Burke and Collins, 1998). However, a further consideration concerns the extent to which there is a clear rationale for the adoption of one of these four design approaches. Arguably this is a crucial issue, especially given the importance of achieving effective transfer of learned skills into business environments. Notably, it was evident that the issue of transfer was implicitly assumed rather than explicitly demonstrated in all the promotional material provided. The results also raise interesting questions about the extent to which programmes use high or low fidelity environments to achieve transfer and the different learning outcomes that may be achieved by grouping managers together from the same company or from different organisations. There are also issues to do with variables likely to impact on the efficacy of skill acquisition such as course duration and the extent to which providers reinforce the learning which has been achieved. These are crucial questions and ones which, to date, have received scant empirical attention. However, the results from this analysis suggest that the process of course design is more procedural than

declarative – i.e. the design of content and method tends to be experientially rather than philosophically driven.

In summary, the emergent themes offer good support for the idea that both generic and specific approaches are used in skills development. Indeed, this analysis would appear to offer support for further research to enable the adoption of a clear theoretical paradigm to guide the design and implementation of courses. In terms of the framework, the evidence from this phase supports the notion of a continuum associated with particular learning environments and outcomes (see Figure 5.1). At this stage however, it is impossible to specify the linkage between particular methodologies and the degree of transfer that may be offered. Notably, the lack of a clearly articulated rationale for the design of courses is of some concern. In short, the findings suggest that providers do what they do because it's perceived to have worked in the past.

The combination of inductive and deductive analysis provided a clear foundation for the next phase of the research methodology which was concerned with clarifying the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work, including whether they were generically or specifically applied. Accordingly, Study Two is reported in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Seven

Study Two – Semi-Structured Interviews with Managers

7.1 Introduction

As the results of Study One revealed, there is some evidence that management development courses utilise both declarative and procedural approaches in skills development. Hence providers' approaches were categorised as declarative, procedural, or a combination of both. Notably however, some designs did not appear to utilise any of these methodologies. Overall, these data indicate that managers are offered a variety of development opportunities based around programme designs which appear to partially support the development of declarative and procedural knowledge. However, in order to develop a holistic picture of the acquisition and transfer of conflict handling skills via OMD, it was first deemed necessary to further investigate the nature of conflict handling, *via* a focus upon the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work. Accordingly, this second study focused upon identifying these skills and the ways in which they were applied.

7.2 Aims and Objectives

As the literature review demonstrated, the process of conflict handling (i.e. regulating conflict levels to optimum) is a key managerial function. However, despite the unequivocal message that conflict handling is important, there is a fundamental lack of information about the skills which are crucially required. Despite the many suggestions concerning strategic (generic) and tactical (specific) approaches, there is a critical absence of research to support skills development – both in respect of which skills are needed, and how they should optimally be deployed in business. Thus, a key initial consideration relates to the broad types of knowledge and skills used and hence the objective of Study Two was as follows:

- To identify the kinds of skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work and to establish whether these are generic or specific in their application.

7.3 Method

Participants

The participants for the study were 18 managers (12 male 6 female) working in a variety of business sectors including travel, education and construction. All participants had some level of managerial responsibility within their organisations, and ranged in age from 25 to 71 years (median age = 42yrs). They were recruited through personal contact, and purposefully sampled to represent the full cross-section of business type, size and structure (Sunderland and Nelson, 1995; see Appendix Three for further details).

Interview Guide, Probes and Conflict Log

An interview guide was developed for data collection. Its purpose was to minimise interviewer bias and to ensure that all participants were asked questions in the same order (Patton, 1987). The interview method was chosen because it allowed for participants to develop their own experiences rather than responding to frames of reference that may have been pre – determined by the interviewer (Ghauri, Gronhaug and Kristianslund, 1995). The semi - structured interview was used not only to understand the "what" and the "how" but also to place more emphasis on exploring the "why" thus, this method was deemed to be the most appropriate to address the objective that had been identified (Robson, 1993).

At the beginning of the interview, managers were asked to comment on a definition of conflict as "a form of interaction between parties that differ in interests, perceptions or preferences" (Brown, 1979 p. 378) and to say whether they agreed, or wished to offer an alternative. All participants subsequently worked with the definition given. The interview structure incorporated elaboration probes and retrospective questions, designed to allow for reflection on past experiences.

In order to further examine managers' skills, two hypothetical vignettes were designed to elicit responses to an individual and a group based conflict scenario. A vignette is "a vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life, in which the

sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time" (Erickson, 1996). Vignettes have been used to examine ethical judgement in a number of populations from children (Dodge, 1980) to criminals (Richard and Dodge, 1982) and development of the vignettes followed procedures utilised by previous investigators who have applied this methodology (*c.f.* Bredemeier, 1984). Two situations were written to reflect conflicts facing managers at work (Tjosvold and Chia, 1989; Baron, 1997). Consensus validation procedures were used to check the vignettes, which were intended to represent an individual and a group based conflict. Hence two additional researchers with a background in qualitative research methods were recruited to read the scenarios and comment upon the language used as well as the degree to which the vignettes were individual *vs.* group based (Bromley, 1986).

The first dilemma featured a situation involving a disagreement with a colleague and the second concerned a conflict with a group of subordinates. Each dilemma was followed by a standard set of probe questions, with the interviewer free to ask additional probes to obtain clarifications. Respondents were asked what action they would take in each situation and all managers provided a rationale for the approaches used. Thus the purpose of the vignettes was to allow participants to explain the reasoning behind their actions and to provide further information about their responses to conflict situations.

The interview guide sections included the following:

1 **Conflict definition** - discussion,

2 **Conflicts** experienced at work and their significance,

3 **Causes of conflict** and their relative importance,

4 **Conflict handling techniques** using examples and rationale for approaches used,

5 **Effects of conflict handling techniques** on self and others,

Vignette I (participants asked to comment on how they would manage an individual conflict).

7. **Vignette 2** (participants asked to explain their approach to a conflict involving a group of people).

NB Further details about the interview schedule can be found in Appendix One. Details of the vignettes are presented in Appendix Two.

At the end of the interview, participants were asked to keep a ten-day log about conflicts that had occurred at work, how they had been handled, and their justification for the approaches used. When the log had been completed, an exit interview was conducted, allowing participants to reflect upon the information provided.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main phase of data collection. One of the purposes of the pilot study is to help the interviewer to make sure the vocabulary level is appropriate and that the questions will be equally meaningful to all of the participants (Backstrom and Hursch - Ceaser, 1981). In addition, the process allows for prior testing of the chosen analysis methods (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). The piloting initially needs to be carried out on a sample that is broadly representative of the overall population and this technique led to the completion and analysis of two interviews with managers drawn from the same subject pool. Respondents were asked to highlight areas of ambiguity or lack of clarity and no problems were reported. The analysis completed was for piloting purposes only and was not

included in the main findings. Satisfactory administration of the pilot survey allowed for the main phase of data collection to be undertaken.

Procedure

Managers were contacted about the nature of the study and asked to participate. Assurances were given that the data would remain strictly confidential and all participants signed a consent form prior to the start. Managers were also sent a copy of the schedule at least two weeks in advance so that they could familiarise themselves with the questions. All interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were recorded and later transcribed *verbatim*.

Data Analysis

The text was content analysed using the procedure and techniques of grounded theory Glaser and Strauss 1967; Gould, Finch and Jackson, 1993). Analysis involved the author becoming completely familiar with the data by reading the transcripts repeatedly and listening to the interview tapes. To remove potential analyst bias, consensus validation procedures were used to select quotes and to identify categories (Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza, 1991). An additional investigator with a background in qualitative research (different to those enlisted for this purpose in the previous study) was also recruited to act as "devils advocate" to critically question the coding and analysis. Subsequently, raw data themes (quotes or paraphrased quotes that captured major ideas) were identified, characterising each managers' response within subsections of the interview. When disagreements between investigators emerged, the transcripts were read again and points of contention discussed (Krane, Anderson and Strean, 1997). Thereafter, agreement was reached between investigators on the raw data themes and individual profile of each manager (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Sectional raw data themes were then compiled across participants which resulted in a listing of raw data themes within each subsection encompassing the sum total of responses by all 18 managers. Following the procedures outlined by Scanlan, Ravizza and Stein (1985), an inductive analysis was performed to generate common themes. Those of greatest abstraction were labelled "general dimensions", second level themes were labelled "higher order themes" and raw data themes comprised the most specific forms of information. Consensus was achieved at each stage of the

procedure. As an additional verification of the inductive analysis, all general dimensions, higher order themes and raw data themes were tested by conducting a deductive analysis whereby the investigators went back to the original transcripts and confirmed that all themes and dimensions were represented. This procedure also allowed the number of managers who cited each theme to be recorded.

Subsequent to this process, responses were re-examined to identify whether actions and/or rationales were based upon generic or specific factors. Thus, the implications of results for the strategic - tactical dimensions were evaluated.

7.4 Results

Figure 7.1 below shows the 82 raw data themes extracted from the transcripts regarding conflict management. Subsequently, these raw data themes were compiled into nine higher order themes and, from these, three higher order dimensions were constructed. The higher order dimensions represent inter-linked factors which encompassed the general fabric of the conflict management process. The three dimensions arrived at were (a) key conflict variables (b) conflict handling skills and (c) characteristics of conflict. These dimensions were not considered to be mutually exclusive. Rather, they represented distinct, albeit intertwined threads of the larger process of conflict handling. Furthermore, in this sample at least, there was a clear level of equivalence between the variables identified by managers in work situations and those generated as a result of the vignette methodology.

RAW DATA THEMES	HIGHER ORDER THEMES	DIMENSION
• Personal problems outside work • Personality differences - attitudes, values, beliefs, perceptions, preferences, interests • Gender / power / cultural / age / educational differences • Jealousy about levels of qualifications / competence • Lack of communication • Degree of personal power / influence / self interest • Emotional factors which may override appropriate responses to conflict • Lack of experience / confidence • Insecurity about job • Lack of training in conflict handling techniques • Degree of self belief / awareness • Different moral / ethical standpoints	INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES	**KEY CONFLICT VARIABLES**
• Lack of clarity about job responsibilities • Organisational change • Competition • Lack of teamwork • Resource issues - time, money, quality of work performance • Historical / cultural issues • Organisational structures • Lack of planning, time management, knowledge, or information • Degree of consultation / involvement between managers and subordinates • Job selection processes • Communication difficulties • Different management / leadership styles • Discrimination • Lack of reward / recognition • Power / political differences	STRUCTURAL / ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS	
• Dissatisfaction with service / product • Tension between full-time and part-time staff	NATURE OF THE ISSUE	

• Flexible approach • Use a goal to determine the rationale for action • Use coping strategies / problem solving activities • Be logical, reasonable and fair • Take action under all circumstances • Use empathy, understanding and communication • Build alliances with people at work • Use third party intervention or arbitration service • Anticipation of potential conflict is significant in securing positive outcomes • Increase sensitivity to the signals that conflict is present / imminent • Use perspective taking • Curb 'natural' emotional reaction in order to invoke appropriate conflict handling response • Use a repertoire of conflict handling behaviours • Active listening • Use avoidance, accommodation, and smoothing approaches • Remain calm • Use staff development to increase competence in conflict handling • Use consulting, listening responses • Counsel the conflicting parties as to appropriate responses • Delegate • Create harmony and empathy with employees • Compromise to reach agreement • Bring all conflict out into the open by good communication • Establish control over conflict situations • Suppress conflict and diffuse it • Use skills and knowledge to manage conflict effectively • Establish understanding about underlying issues • Anticipate all conflict and take action • Use 'brainstorming' • Maintain optimal conflict levels for maximum benefit • Be self aware about the effects of conflict management behaviours and their application	STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT	**CONFLICT HANDLING SKILLS**

• Different styles for different conflicts • See people individually • Use a step-by-step approach - establish facts, get parties to identify the problem, mediate between parties for a win-win outcome, make a judgement about the actions to be taken • Avoid conflict with clients • Collaborate with staff to achieve understanding about the conflict • With suppliers, use competition and confrontation • Under some circumstances, ignore the conflict • Modify approach depending upon the personal impact upon individuals in the organisation • Approach is mediated by whether the conflict is resolvable or non resolvable • Source of conflict will determine the appropriate response • Try and match the other parties' approach • Use inside knowledge and insight to rationalise the conflict handling approach	TACTICS FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT	
• Conflicts amongst entire organisations are more difficult to manage • Conflict which impacts upon people is more significant for work performance • Conflict is an important stimulus for change • Conflicts present important personal challenges which spur better productivity • Too much conflict affects organisational performance negatively • Some conflicts are simply unmanageable and this can be destructive • Lack of consistency / competence in application of conflict handling skills can have negative outcomes	POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVE / NEGATIVE EFFECTS	**CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICT**
• Between Customers and Staff • Amongst staff • Between Organisations • Between groups	CONFLICT AT DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONAL LEVELS	
• Change gives rise to conflict • Diverse variables contribute to the escalation / deescalation of conflict; therefore flexibility in approach is required	UNPREDICTABILITY	

Figure 7.1 Hierarchical development of variables in the process of conflict handling

Table 7.1 Number and percentage of managers (n=18) providing raw data themes falling into major categories. Factors identified by managers as being significant in the process of conflict handling.

Dimension/Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Key conflict variables	17	94.4
Individual Differences	15	88.3
Structural / Organisational factors	13	72.2
Nature of the issue	5	27.8
Conflict Handling Skills	13	72.2
Combination of Strategic / Tactical approaches	9	50.0
Strategies	6	33.3
Tactics	6	33.3
Characteristics of conflict	17	94.4
Potential for positive / negative effects	12	66.7
Conflict at different organisational levels	9	50.0
Unpredictability	4	22.2
Conflict Logs Returned	8	44.4

Table 7.1 reports the percentage of managers who identified each of the dimensions and higher order themes. All of the responses are represented, including the percentage of individuals who returned the conflict logs. Additionally, managers usually identified more than one variable as being significant, and as a consequence, the total numbers appearing within a dimension could exceed the number of managers who reported that dimension. For example, in the dimension of key conflict variables, the number of times the three higher order themes are mentioned exceeds the number representing the overall dimension (Scanlan, Stein and Ravissa, 1991). The observation that managers identify more than one conflict variable is consistent with the notion of conflict management as a dynamic and complex process. Each of the three general dimensions of conflict handling are discussed below (see Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1).

Key Conflict Variables. The most frequently referred to higher order theme within this dimension was "Individual Differences", which simply referred to personal characteristics which may influence conflict interactions. Eighty-eight percent of

managers made comments abstracted into this higher order theme which was evidenced from the following quotation:

> The problem I have with a couple of staff at the moment is that one member of staff is more highly qualified, older and generally more experienced than a younger, very enthusiastic other member of staff. She's generally a very aggressive type person anyway and doesn't like to be told what to do by anybody except a senior member. The other more experienced person is very good management material, very good at getting things done, a great organiser, and unfortunately, the younger, less experienced person doesn't really appreciate this at all. She's just a bit too fiery and mostly I put it down to her age.

The second theme was "Structural / Organisational Factors". Seventy-two percent of managers mentioned this category which referred to the nature of the working environment and its significance in respect of the onset and duration of conflict interactions. This higher order theme was reflected in comments such as the following:

> I inherited a situation where some people were given power within the organisation. The man who was in charge of finances and the person who was in charge of buildings. Both are powerful positions - the building is insured for £6.5 million and the treasurer was in charge of £400 000 worth of investments. Sadly, I was unable to keep these people on board.

Similarly, another manager commented:

> The lower day-to-day conflicts are about free lance staff, and I deal with these. The conflicts are around money (times, dates and amounts) and unhappiness with the office facilities. I also have conflict with the local county council over the offices we hire from them. The orientation of their employees is very public sector orientated and not commercial and this causes major conflicts of interest. I can't make them see that my clients have different commercial orientations from them and there's a lot of conflict over this. The freelance trainers are also self employed and this complicates the situation.

The higher order theme of "nature of the issue" was mentioned by twenty-seven percent of managers. This category referred to factors which may cause conflict, or

issues which may be significant in determining the outcome of conflict interactions. One manager stated:

> In my organisation, there are culture problems. The management don't talk to us, don't trust us. People do what they have to do to protect themselves. Conflict is often over "soft" people issues. If these are sorted out, then people don't worry so much about the harder problems, like money or conditions. Get the basics right - and reduce the conflict at the people level and then the other conflicts will not escalate. There will always be conflict between me and my staff over certain issues. I can't always avoid conflict. People will always beg to differ on certain issues and I'll try and minimise conflict if it's unnecessary. It's poor management that doesn't have the ability to minimise unnecessary conflict.

Conflict handling skills. The dimension of conflict handling skills was considered to reflect the various approaches to conflict employed by managers. This included both strategic (generic) and tactical (situation specific skills). The higher order theme "a combination of strategic and tactical approaches" was cited by fifty percent of managers. Although this category does not have any corresponding raw data themes (see Table 7.1), it is comprised of combinations of the raw data themes represented under the higher order themes of "strategies" and "tactics" (see Figure 7.1). Thus, half the sample said that they used both generic and specific approaches to conflict.

Descriptions of conflict handling skills under the higher order theme of "strategies" referred to approaches to conflict handling which were broadly applied across different situations. One manager commented that "all conflicts must finish up beat with a feel good factor" and similarly:

> My strengths lie in my lobbying - influencing, persuading and motivating. I can get myself out of (or round) most conflicts by talking and listening. I try and be conciliatory, to involve people in what they are doing, to encourage them to own up to their role in things and take responsibility.

The other related higher order theme concerned specific approaches and was labelled "tactics". Thirty-three percent of managers made comments conceptualised under this higher order theme. Tactical approaches involved attempts to regulate conflict which were specific to particular circumstances. One manager demonstrated the use

of a tactical approach as follows: "It's no good using the same approach and expecting it to work across the board. The approach must be adjusted, depending." From a similar perspective another manager commented:

> If the conflict is due to a lack of understanding, I try to anticipate it and develop understanding. If this can be achieved, a mutually satisfactory compromise can usually be found. If the conflict is due to different priorities between departments, these have to be tackled "head on". When the conflict is over personal factors, it's better to skirt round them, to circumvent them. Usually, these conflicts can be avoided.

Characteristics of conflict. The most frequently referred to higher order theme within the dimension of characteristics of conflict was "potential for positive / negative effects". In this category, managers identified various outcomes resulting from their approach to conflict interactions. This was abstracted from comments such as the following:

> Systems of alliances help resolve conflicts. When you have someone with whom you have a positive relationship, you have the makings of an alliance. Network this into a system. When difficulties occur, your allies will act with you, and in doing so, will influence the actions of potential opponents so they are relatively unable to act against you.

Similarly, another manager discussed positive outcomes:

> Technically, it's easier to manage if you are an effective conflict manager. It's also emotional, in that the manager and staff feel that their interests are being promoted and that the manager will take stick on the staffs' behalf. There are certain "manager" duties and certain "staff" duties which have to be carried out. Therefore, effective conflict management approaches can build positive attitudes and raise standards of staff performance.

Examples of negative effects included the following:

> I deal with conflict badly. Although I am an experienced manager, I'm not good at conflict handling. I need to calm down and take a breath as I tend to go straight for the throat. I have to get myself under control before I act, as I could be the biggest offender potentially.

A good example of conflict occurring at different organisational levels emerged from one manager, who categorised conflict as follows:

> I look at conflict in two ways. I have direct conflict between me and another person, or I have a situation where there is conflict between two other parties which I have to resolve. The first category is direct conflict, which could arise over a performance issue or something similar. The second may involve me in trying to change someone's attitude - to influence the way they go about doing something - but this sort of conflict comes in various forms.

In a similar vein, another manager said:

> There is conflict between managers at different hierarchical levels in the organisation, and there are conflicts between managers and subordinates, although these are in the minority. In all of these categories, some conflicts are due to role differences (particularly in resource and ideology terms) and there are also conflicts due to peoples' different personalities and backgrounds.

The issue of unpredictability was reflected in comments such as the following:

> I'd like to be able to stop conflicts sooner. It usually gets to me when it has reached boiling point. I'd like to be able to see things coming. A lot of it is peoples' sensitivity. I'm not particularly sensitive to some situations, especially banter, jokes and personal comments that might show there is conflict.

7.5 Discussion

Objective: To identify the kinds of skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work and to establish whether these are specific or generic in their application.

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that managers use a variety of approaches to work conflict and thus the results support the general research on conflict management which has, to date, relied on anecdotal rather then empirical evidence for the development of abilities in conflict handling (Kolb and Bartunek, 1992; Rahim, 1992; Deutsch, 1994; Rubin, Pruitt and Hee Kim, 1994). Emergent themes also support the nature of conflict handling as a dynamic complex process involving any number of generic or specific approaches, often applied in

combination (Womack, 1988). In addition, these findings are consistent with the conceptual underpinnings of theorists who draw attention to the range of variables encountered by managers in their attempts to resolve conflicts (Muniz and Chasnoff, 1986; Feather, 1990; Huczynski, 1991). The inductive analysis revealed that overall, thirteen managers (72% of the sample) reported using conflict handling skills. Within this category, six managers (33%) said that they used skills which were applied generically across situations. The higher order theme of "strategies" contained 31 raw data themes reflecting generic approaches to work conflict. In contrast, six respondents (33%) employed skills which varied differentially according to the circumstances. The higher order theme of "tactics" contained 12 raw data themes representing situation specific skills. It is interesting to note that nine managers (50%) reported using a combination of strategic and tactical approaches to work conflict and thus, in some circumstances, the skills were adjusted to fit the situation, whilst, in others the general approach was the same.

In addition to the existing conflict handling literature, the results provide a taxonomy which could be used as a foundation for skills development. The data suggest that, for this sample at least, managers apply their skills in one of three ways, namely strategically, tactically or in combination. Additionally, of the total sample, twenty seven percent (n=5) did not report using conflict handling skills (although it is possible that skills were indeed being utilised but managers did not perceive this to be the case). This taxonomy could be used as a basis for examining the design of training and development provision and is not inconsistent with the skills categories of "declarative", "procedural", "both" and "neither", highlighted as a result of the content analysis of management development brochures (Study One). However, in the domain of conflict handling, there is currently a fundamental lack of empirical research to support such provision and hence these data provide the basis for a direction of research which employs a focus upon skills clarification and development, rather than a solely knowledge-based approach. Although the findings have echoes with the literature on strategic *vs.* tactical approaches, important additions include information about the skills reportedly used, and the ways in which they are subsequently deployed by managers in work contexts.

Nine of the managers sampled in this investigation (50%) reported experiences of conflict at different organisational levels. This higher order theme contained four raw data themes (between customers and staff, amongst staff, between organisations, and between groups) and these categories correspond closely to those suggested by conflict theorists (Sundaram and Black, 1992, Haunschild, 1993, Davies, 1991). Thus these data provide empirical confirmation of the levels at which conflict is described in the literature – namely inter-organisational, inter/intra group and individual. However, although the results support the literature classification, further investigation to clarify these categories seems justified, given the amount of raw data themes cited.

Further deductive analysis of these data allowed for emergent categories to be checked against the literature–based framework (see Figure 5.1). Overall, these findings offer good support for the idea that managers apply their skills generically, specifically, and in combination to regulate conflict levels to optimum. Thus, the results are consistent with the strategic–tactical continuum suggested in the framework although at this stage, the linkage between the underlying knowledge base (i.e. declarative or procedural) and skills deployment has not yet been established.

Thus, the analysis offers useful information about the skills used by managers in work settings and supports the strategic–tactical continuum as a basis for further investigation into the underlying determinants of skills deployment. Based on these findings, several lines of future research seem warranted. To begin with, it would be useful to identify the fundamental factors influencing managers' decisions about conflict handling (including the underlying knowledge base), in order to glean more information about the circumstances under which skills may be deployed. Another important area of analysis concerns clarification of the levels at which conflict occurs as this line of enquiry may prove useful in further confirming or otherwise refuting the categories offered in the literature. Accordingly, the information gleaned about the nature of conflict handling from these first two studies was used to provide a

foundation for investigations into the process of conflict regulation (See Figure 1.1). Thus, Study Three employed a focus upon the underlying rationale for the skills deployed, including the levels at which conflict may be manifest.

Chapter Eight

Study Three – Semi Structured Interviews with Managers

8.1 Introduction

The analysis of management development brochures in Study One revealed the use of both declarative and procedural approaches in respect of skills development, whilst data from Study Two provided a taxonomy of approaches which included strategic and tactical skills. However, the review of literature has shown that, not only is there a scarcity of information about how such skills are utilised, there is also a fundamental lack of research concerning their link with the knowledge base underlying skills deployment (Deutsch, 1994). Accordingly, this phase of the fieldwork heralded a focus upon the process of conflict regulation, including this essential knowledge component. A further line of enquiry was concerned with identifying categories of conflict based on managers' experience in business in order to glean more information about the levels at which conflict may be encountered. A third and final strand of investigation involved research to establish the perceived sources of the skills utilised in order to obtain further data about the decision - making processes involved.

8.2 Aims and Objectives

Insofar as the OMD framework is concerned (see Figure 5.1) the overall aim of the thesis was to develop the concepts which have been outlined in order to check for their applicability in relation to OMD provision. Thereafter, the objectives of the research allowed for the fieldwork to be structured and administered so as to provide data that enabled the primary aim to be achieved. Given the critical role of knowledge in skills development, productive outcomes are more likely when managers possess both knowledge and skills practice (Rahim, 1992). However, there is comparatively little discussion about the role of knowledge in the process of conflict regulation and few evaluative frameworks to support skills development (Deutsch, 1994). Accordingly, the first objective of this study was to determine the

knowledge base and any underlying factors influencing managers' decisions about conflict handling.

The second objective of the study was to assess the veracity of a system of conflict classification derived from the literature. Although it is clear that managers will encounter conflict at different organisational levels, i.e. between organisations as well as within them, there is little guidance as to where the boundaries lie. As Chapter Three has shown, conflict has been described at the inter-organisational level (Davies, 1991; Hoffman, Fredrick and Petry, 1989) at the inter and intra - group level (Handy, 1983; Rahim, 1992) and on a one-to-one basis between individuals (Davidson, 1990; Van di Vliert and Kabanoff, 1990). However, no clear data exist to demonstrate the genericity or specificity of conflict management skills either within or between these settings. Different approaches may also be appropriate at different managerial levels. Thus, whilst it is likely that senior managers may be called upon to deal with conflict at the inter -organisational level more frequently than those in middle or junior management, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support such a claim. Indeed, the task of establishing a system of classification is further complicated by the overlap between the levels at which conflict occurs, and thus managers may find themselves dealing with conflict on more than one level at a time. Therefore, data were also gathered on the kinds of conflict experienced by managers at work in order to construct meaningful categories and to provide further insight into the process of conflict regulation.

Thirdly, although the literature contains many suggestions about conflict management, including the contrasting strategic (one way best) and tactical (contingency) perspectives, few studies have investigated managers' perceptions of the ways in which such skills that <u>are</u> used, are acquired. For example, although recent work appears to offer support for the idea that a combination of problem solving and forcing may work best in conflict situations, there is a dearth of empirical data to support the development of specific skills to fit this advice (Van di Vliert, *et. al.*, 1999). Therefore, an important final focus for this study involved assessing managers' perceptions of the sources of the skills which they deployed.

In summary, this investigation had three key objectives:

- To determine the knowledge base (and any underlying factors) influencing managers' decisions about conflict handling,
- To establish categories of conflict based on managers' experiences in business and to compare these categories with those proposed in the literature,
- To specify the perceived sources of skills utilised by managers to deal with conflict at work.

8.3 Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 18 managers (12 male, 6 female – different to Study Two) working in a variety of business sectors including leisure, education and construction. All participants had some level of managerial responsibility within their organisations and ranged in age from 27 to 58 years (median age = 35yrs). The participants were recruited through personal contact and purposefully sampled to reflect the full cross section of business type, size and structure (Sunderland and Nelson, 1995). A full list of manager profiles is included in Appendix Four alongside the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code definitions which were used a basis for selection (see Appendix 3).

Development of the Conflict Video and Interview Guide

A video was developed to facilitate and standardise the acquisition of data, and to establish a methodological link between participant's responses to different conflict situations (Patton, 1987). The video portrayed four conflict scenarios and was recorded at The University of Luton. The introduction was written and presented by the author and read from auto-cue. The four conflict scenarios were selected from training videos and popular television broadcasts to represent the different types of conflict encountered in business namely inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual.

Before the onset of the pilot investigation, two researchers with postgraduate qualifications in the social sciences were recruited to watch the conflict video and to independently identify the levels at which conflict was represented. Subsequently, both researchers recognised these as inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual. As a further check, they were also instructed to comment upon the dialogue given by the author and to make proposals for any changes to enhance clarity and reduce ambiguity. Once this process was complete, a pilot study was conducted prior to the onset of the investigation. Its purpose was to refine the video script and the interview guide so that respondents would have no problems in answering the questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000). Two additional researchers (other than those referred to above) with a background in the social sciences were recruited to watch the conflict video and to scrutinise the interview schedule. They were instructed to highlight areas of ambiguity or lack of clarity, and to act as "devil's advocate" to check the accuracy and structure of the questions (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). In addition, two pilot interviews were conducted with managers. Respondents were asked to highlight questions which appeared vague or imprecise and any instructions emanating from either the letter or the video that were unclear. These data were used for piloting purposes only and not included in the main findings. The satisfactory completion of the pilot work allowed for the main phase of data collection to commence.

The video clips were introduced as follows:

> The following video contains four extracts. Each of these represents a situation of conflict. In the first clip, the chief executive of a hearing aid company talks about how the organisation responded to competition (RUN CLIP 1 – Inter- organisational conflict). In the next two extracts, you will see managers participating in an outdoor adventure course. There have been a series of head to head competitions throughout the week but, towards then end of the course, some of the managers have become disillusioned. (RUN CLIP 2 – Inter-group conflict). The next clip shows managers on the same outdoor programme. In this situation, the group discusses problem they've had during one of the activities (RUN CLIP 3 – Intra-group conflict). You may recognise some of the actors in this last clip which shows a conflict involving three people (RUN CLIP 4 – Individual conflict). You've now watched all of the video extracts. Thanks for your time in helping with the research.

All participants received a copy of the video and a covering letter two weeks prior to the start of the investigation (see Appendix Five for a copy of the covering letter). An interview was then conducted with each participant after they had watched the video twice (see below).

An interview guide was developed to minimise interviewer effects by asking participants the same questions in the same words in the same order of presentation (Patton, 1987). The schedule was designed to include standardised probes to minimise bias by the interviewer and to ensure that responses from all participants were explored in equal complexity and depth by asking follow up questions in a similar manner (Torrington, 1991). Questions emerged from the purposes plus the need to confirm the ecological validity of results obtained from the video clips as equivalent to "real life" management situations. The interview guide included the following questions:

Question One:

Thinking back to the clips you have just seen...

For each clip 1-4, imagine you were the line manager of the people concerned.

General Probes:

What would you do and why?

Where did you learn that approach (elaborate if necessary...e.g. from a training course, from experience?)

Question Two:

The clips you have seen are intended to represent different levels of conflict (Clip 1= inter-organisational, Clip 2 = inter-group, Clip 3 = intra-group, Clip 4 = individual). Can you recall dealing with these types of conflict at work?

General Probes:

If so, for each type, what did you do and why?

Where did you learn that approach?

If not, how were your experiences different?

Could you offer some examples of conflicts you've managed?

What did you do and why?

Where did you learn that approach?

Question Three:

Is there anything similar about your approach to the conflicts in the video and your approach to managing conflict at work?

General Probes:

If so, could you identify the similarities?

If not, could you explain the differences?

Question Four:

Can you think of any other levels of conflict you've experienced which are not covered by the conflict classification we've mentioned?

General Probes:

If so, could you identify these?

Could you explain why they are different from the classification?

Taking all the conflict levels we've talked about into consideration, which is the most common in your experience?

Question Five:

Have you ever received training in conflict management?

General Probes:

If so, did you find it useful?

Could you explain why?

If not, what would you like such training to cover?

NB a copy of the full interview schedule can be found in Appendix 6.

Procedure

Participants were contacted by mail or by phone, informed about the nature of the study and asked to participate. They were then sent a copy of the video and the covering letter, and assurances were given that the data would remain confidential. All managers signed a consent form prior to the start. The interviews were conducted personally by the author who visited each respondent at their preferred venue. The covering letter specified an estimated time of 40 minutes per interview (although there were no other time restrictions imposed by the respondents). The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and were recorded and later transcribed *verbatim.*

Data Analysis

The text was content analysed using the procedures recommended by Patton (1990) and Scanlan, Ravizza and Stein (1989). Analysis involved having three researchers follow the qualitative research methodology described by Taylor and Bogdan (1984) and Bromley (1986). Thus, three researchers (including the author) independently familiarised themselves with the data by watching the video, reading the transcriptions and listening to the interview tapes. One of these individuals was also used to critically analyse the data for Study 2. Although it could be argued that this may have the effect of magnifying subjectivity, it has been suggested that trying to divest subjectivity from the process may be a suspect practice in itself (Krane, Anderson and Strean, 1997). Thus the primary focus was on controlling potential bias via an emphasis on critical questioning and analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 1995) and is consistent with the approach recommended by other researchers who have used this methodology (Gould, Eklund and Jackson, 1983; Gould, Finch and Jackson, 1993). Subsequently, raw data themes (quotes or paraphrased quotes that captured major ideas) were taken from *verbatim* transcriptions of the interviews. Each quote represented "a statement made by the subject which was self definable and self delimiting in the expression of a single, recognisable aspect of the subject's

experience" (Cloonan, 1971 p.117). Inductive content analysis procedures were used to organise raw data into interpretable and meaningful categories that emerged directly from the subject's own words. This process resulted in an individual profile summarising each managers' response within subsections of the interview. The author and the two other investigators discussed the profile of each subject and, when disagreements between researchers emerged, points of contention were discussed until consensus was reached (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Following the procedures outlined by Scanlan, Ravizza and Stein (1985), an inductive analysis was performed to generate common themes. Highest level themes labelled "general dimensions" represented common themes of greatest abstraction or generality. Second order themes were labelled "higher order themes" and raw data themes comprised the most specific forms of information. As an additional verification of the inductive procedure, the raw data themes, higher order themes and general dimensions were tested using a deductive process whereby the investigators reread the transcripts to ensure that all the themes and dimensions were represented.

8.4 Results

Question One (Skills and Underlying Factors)

Figure 8.1 below shows the 85 raw data themes extracted from the transcripts for question one in which managers were asked to explain their approaches to the conflicts portrayed in the video clips. These raw data themes were complied into nine higher order themes and, from these, two general dimensions were constructed. The two dimensions arrived at were (a) generic approaches and (b) specific approaches and, although these categories represented expressed conflict management preferences, they were not intended to be mutually exclusive. Rather, they represented part of the overall process of conflict regulation. The five higher order themes under the dimension of "generic approaches" were 1) problem solving / decision making approaches, 2) development of creative, co-operative processes, 3) knowledge / experience, 4) structural / organisational and 5) communications based. Under the dimension of "specific approaches", four higher order themes were constructed. These were labelled 1) individual differences, 2) rooted in the conflict issue, 3) step by step approaches, and 4) rooted in the conflict level.

Table 8.1 below reports the numbers and percentage of managers who identified specific and generic approaches to conflict management, subdivided by response to the four levels of conflict portrayed in the video clips (i.e. inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group, and individual). As far as the numerical presentation of results are concerned, it has been argued that that the quantification of qualitative data is a mixing of paradigms which does not serve either particularly well (Anderson, Williams, Aldridge and Taylor, 1996). It has also been suggested that placing a percentage or frequency count after each category is tantamount to saying how important it is. However, as Krane, Anderson and Strean (1997) have postulated:

> In many cases, rare experiences are no less meaningful, useful or important than common ones. In some cases, the rare experience may be the most enlightening one. In other situations, it may make perfect sense to provide frequency counts of data themes, such as when conducting a content analysis (p. 215).

Thus for the purposes of this study, it was deemed important to provide a measure of quantification in order to facilitate insight into the complexity of the conflict regulation process but it was also acknowledged that ultimately, the main criteria of importance lay in the hands of the participants.

Table 8.2 highlights the numbers and percentage of managers who identified each of the dimensions and higher order themes. Additionally, managers usually identified more than one variable as being significant, and, as a consequence, the total number appearing within a dimension can exceed the number of managers who reported that dimension. For example, in the dimension of generic approaches, the number of times the five higher order themes are mentioned exceeds the number representing the overall dimension (Scanlan, Stein and Ravissa, 1991). Indeed, the observation that managers tend to identify a variety of significant variables is somewhat unsurprising, given the messages emerging from the literature about the complexity of the conflict management process. Each of the dimensions and higher order themes are discussed below (see Figure 8.1 and Tables 8.1 and 8.2).

RAW DATA THEMES	HIGHER ORDER THEMES	DIMENSION
• Set objectives • Get information about the conflict prior to decisions • Go through a series of decision making options • Take calculated risks • Work out a strategy • Deal with problems as soon as they occur • Listen to the wishes of the majority, then take a decision • Seek to moderate conflicts	PROBLEM SOLVING/ DECISION MAKING APPROACHES	**GENERIC APPROACHES**
• Buying time to consider options • Be direct & elicit discussions with teams • Assess the ingredients of conflict • Mix tried & tested methods with new/innovative ones • Create equality based on respect • Achieve a compromise • Give both sides the responsibility of putting their view forward • Explore reasons behind the conflict at the outset – get to the root cause, not the overt response • Use consultation • Use conflict as a catalyst to encourage consideration of alternative responses	DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE, CO-OPERATIVE PROCESSES	
• Get information about parties strengths and weaknesses • Learn approaches from experience • Use information to form a conflict handling strategy • Use experience to work out what the majority want • Use 'know how' or 'feel' for the right response • Anticipate conflict and act before it's too late	KNOWLEDGE/ EXPERIENCE	
• Use documentation to support decisions Take account of the industry environment (markets, regulations & competitiveness) • Get control of the conflict using the organisation • Cut down on hierarchy • Take a back seat, let the conflict "roll" • Stop the conflict before it spreads to the rest of the team • Encourage employees to take responsibility for their role in conflict • Actively manage conflict situations • Be objective as far as possible • Use third party interventions	STRUCTURAL/ ORGANISATIONAL	

• Encourage open communication at all levels • Use consultation and discussion • Use empathy • Come up with a response and sell it to people as if it were their idea • Use consultation • If lines of communication are open, let the conflict "run" • Clarify the conflict with parties and try and control it • Use listening skills • Sell solutions to the workforce using influencing skills • Use persuasion • Make people feel important and part of the team • Create a friendly, calm working environment • Protect employees • Avoid polarising people in conflict • Act as a mediator • Be 'ever the diplomat'	COMMUNICATIONS BASED	**GENERIC APPROACHES (cont'd.)**
• Get staff buy in to make radical changes • Create a relaxed working environment for productive outcomes • Encourage individuals to have the courage of their convictions in some conflict situations • Harness support from staff so that potential conflict can be anticipated • Adjust your response to take account of the potential reactions of conflicting parties • Take the emotion out of the situation to create time in certain situations • In some circumstances, people are wary of radical responses – these are not always advisable	INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES**
• Change approach depending on the importance of the issue • Use avoidance in outdoor settings • Don't take sides when the issue is personal (between x2 other parties) • The urgency of the task mediates the response • Concentrate on data rather than emotion • Use avoidance unless the problem is severe • Avoid conflict if things are under control • Conflict handling approach depends on the industry	ROOTED IN THE CONFLICT ISSUE	

RAW DATA THEMES	HIGHER ORDER THEMES	DIMENSION
• Think before you act • If the conflict is physical, 're-group' – cause the parties to change focus • Emphasise step-by-step communication • If the conflict involves abuse or is physical, diffuse the situation • Move progressively towards a solution • Be selective with approach in particular environments and use an underlying rationale for productive outcomes • Use an 'if ... then ....' Approach • In physical/abusive conflicts, remove parties from public, then seek reasons for the conflict, then monitor the situation on an ongoing basis • When conflict is escalating, push the 'pause' button – stop people, and ask for clarification • Take things in 'small bites' • First, listen to parties individually (if not directly involved), then try and resolve things	STEP BY STEP APPROACHES (PROGRESSIVE)	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES (cont'd)**
<u>INTERORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT</u>: • Allow 'open' conflict to surface • Issue individual targets • Communicate directly with senior management for good results <u>INTER-GROUP CONFLICTS</u>: • Manage potential conflict <u>INTRA-GROUP CONFLICT</u>: • Initiate one-to-one discussion to open up communication • Separate individuals, then deal with situation <u>INDIVIDUAL CONFLICT</u>: • Separate parties immediately • If the conflict is personal, emotional reactions should take over • Don't avoid the situation or conflict will escalate	ROOTED IN THE CONFLICT LEVEL	

<u>Figure 8.1</u> Components of Conflict handling skills reported by managers in response to Video Clips 1-4. Question One (n= 18)

Table 8.1 Approaches to Conflict Handling reported by managers in response to video clips 1-4 Question One (n=18)

Conflict Scenario	Generic Approaches		Specific Approaches		Combination of Specific Approach with Generic Rationale	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
1 – INTER-ORGANISATIONAL	7	38	6	33	5	27
2 – INTER-GROUP	7	38	7	38	4	22
3 – INTRA-GROUP	6	33	7	38	5	27
4 – INDIVIDUAL	4	22	9	50	5	27

Table 8.2 Number and Percentage of Managers (n=18) providing raw data themes falling into major categories. Components of conflict handling skills – Question One video clips 1-4 (n=18)

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Generic Approaches	17	94.4
Knowledge / Experience	10	55.5
Development of Creative, Co-operative processes	7	38.8
Communications based	9	50.0
Structural / Organisational	5	27.8
Problem Solving / Decision Making	4	22.2
Specific Approaches	13	72.2
Step by Step Approaches (Progressive)	9	50.0
Rooted in the Conflict Issue	9	50.0
Individual Differences	6	33.3
Rooted in the Conflict Level	4	22.2

Generic Approaches. The most frequently referred to higher order theme within the dimension of Generic Approaches was "knowledge / experience", which referred to how knowledge about the conflict or experience in similar situations informed managers' approaches. Fifty-five percent of managers made comments abstracted into this higher order theme which was reflected in comments such as:

> I am used to working in competitive situations in most of the earlier jobs that I have been employed in and I suppose I was quite lucky in getting a reasonable management training as a student in the early years. I have a clear understanding of management ideology which arises from my own political background as an active member of a left wing party for many years and I was formally trained in management sociology and psychology as part of the MBA many years ago. My thesis specialism in my MBA was intra-organisational politics and I find this all on very familiar ground.

In a similar vein, another manager commented:

> My contact with industry was of an industry changing and becoming more modern, but using people who are still largely half in that age and half aged ten years ago and in today's age, ten years is a long time. I would find it difficult to take a situation where I took a lot of people I knew to be competent and in the medium to short term make them less competent by taking away all the things that they believed in and stood for.

The second most frequently referred to theme within the dimension of Generic Approaches was "communications based". Fifty percent of managers mentioned this category which referred to the various communication techniques utilised in dealing with conflict. One manager responded to clip 3 (intra-group conflict) as follows:

> If I was managing that situation, I would advise people to stick to their guns. Do what you feel is right but then again, you have to be persuasive if you are trying to get people to do what you think is right and you have got to be convincing, very convincing and give good reasons for something to be done and not just for the sake of it.

The higher order theme "development of creative, co-operative processes" within the dimension of Generic Approaches was mentioned by 38% of managers. This category represented attempts by managers to resolve conflict in a non-confrontational manner. Examples of this theme included the following quotation:

> For me, it's really important that we have calm here. It's really important that staff are relaxed and happy and that there is no aggression as any problems in the ranks gets passed directly to the customers. Staff work long hours, and this business is not particularly well paid. Part of the reason you keep your staff is a friendly environment. I have worked for companies that treat their staff like slaves, basically and I know how upsetting and soul destroying that can be. A lot of these people have spent three years at university to earn ten

> or twelve thousand pounds a year and the least we can do is to make the environment happy for them if we expect them to stay.

Also within the dimension of generic approaches, the higher order theme of "structural / organisational" referred to characteristics of the organisation or industry structure that mediated their attempts to resolve conflict. In responding to Clip One (inter-organisational conflict), one manager said:

> I think the approach to that situation would depend a lot on the people he (the CEO) is working with and the fact that it is an individual company in some ways makes it easier because if you were for argument's sake looking at the bank's structure it would be very much more difficult for us as a branch within a big structure to say we are going to turn everything upside down and do it a different way because of the whole rigidity of the structure of the bank and the way they like things done and the rules they implement and the rest of it. So for an individual smaller company to do it is perhaps slightly easier than say a bank or school or something like that which has a lot more conformity about it.

The other related higher order theme in the dimension of Generic Approaches was "problem solving / decision making". This idea referred to conflict handling techniques involving problem solving activities. Twenty two percent of managers made comments abstracted into this higher order theme which was evidenced from the following quotation in which one manager responded to the inter-group scenario in which a group of managers are deciding whether to jump off a boat into the sea:

> I would try and diffuse the whole situation so that no one went overboard. Then, they would sit down with me, the leader of both groups and try to come to some sort of compromise on whether we should go overboard or not. You would really have to impose your authority over the whole situation if it got out of hand. You have got to stamp some sort of authority on it and convince them that you need to be listened to, you are going to be the mediator. They need to listen to what you have to say and maybe you can come up with a compromise.

Specific Approaches. The most frequently referred to higher order theme within this dimension was "step by step" or progressive techniques. In this category, managers identified approaches applied sequentially to move the conflict towards a desired outcome. One managers' response to the individual conflict scenario was as follows:

> The two people need to be taken out into a neutral environment and possibly just leave them together to get to the bottom of it between the two of them. So, you might need a mediator there to start with. They both want to win, it just won't end, you won't resolve the situation. So to begin with you have got to get them out of the eye of other people, split them apart if necessary for a while to cool down but then get them together to talk it all through to actually decide, even if they can't agree at the end of the day to actually agree to disagree.

In a similar vein, another manager said:

> We've done quite a lot with the individual teams here but it is a slow process because you can't be too radical for fear of it going wrong and not achieving in the meantime, so you have got to do it step by step rather than all in one big hit.

The second most frequently referred to higher order theme within the dimension of Specific Approaches was "rooted in the conflict issue", which included approaches linked to the source of the conflict. Nine managers (50% of the sample) made comments conceptualised under this category which was evidenced from the following example:

> How can I best serve the customers with the resource I have available to me? Now what we have put into place is along the lines of I will get the Heads (of departments) together, the team leaders as such from respective departments and say "right, we have a problem here as far as queuing is concerned. We have a problem here as far as customers are not being served. We have a problem here as far as we are not giving the service that customers expect of the bank. What do you suggest?" So yes, I will probably come up with ideas, but I look for input because at the end of the day it's them that serve the customers and it's them that are going to be faced with the crap if a customer is not being served. So if you can sell it to the people who are actually doing the serving i.e. this is your baby, you come up with the idea, then that's half the job done.

Descriptions of conflict handling skills under the higher order theme of "individual differences" represented attempts to regulate conflict arising out of differences

between individuals and groups. Six managers (33%) responded in this category. Evidence of this theme was found in the following quotation:

> The approach I would have taken (with the inter-group scenario) would be to find out something about the people who were there and their strengths and weaknesses. If it was a mixed group, you can produce situations of conflict and stress very similar to the instant type of decision making situation without it being quite so contrived. It would be no good for me giving a seven stone weakling a bar that has been lifted by a world champion heavy weight lifter. He would just fail and in failing, he would lose credibility himself. I have learned from people all my life but I am an individual, so yes, my response is tempered by how I have seen other people respond and act.

The higher order theme "rooted in the conflict level" was concerned with approaches influenced by the level at which conflict occurred. One manager commented on the individual scenario as follows:

> It was a good open conflict with a very clear effect on everyone concerned and it was the kind of open, loud conflict that will actually cause the recipient of the input to modify her behaviour. I actually liked the approach of going out there and having an open conflict because I think the suppression of conflict isn't always good for its resolution and that by civilising a conflict and reducing the scale of it you can if you are not careful trivialise it and I have certainly been in two situations in my working life where it was necessary to have open, loud clear conflict in order to solve a problem and to make sure that the other people around the offending individual were aware of exactly how forcefully I felt about it and what my opinions were in detail.

Figure 8.2 shows the data extracted from the transcripts for Question One relating to underlying factors influencing decisions about conflict handling. Forty seven raw data themes were complied into six higher order themes namely 1) structural, 2) problem solving, 3) concern for personnel, 4) individual factors, 5) knowledge and 6) training and development. From these, three dimensions were constructed. The three dimensions were (a) organisationally based, (b) human relations based, and (c) experiential. The dimensions arrived at represented distinct, albeit intertwined elements identified by managers in response to the four video clips.

Table 8.3 reports the numbers and percentage of managers who identified each of the dimensions and higher order themes and all of the responses are represented. As

some of the participants identified more than one variable as being significant, the numbers appearing in that dimension can exceed the numbers of managers who reported that dimension (Gould, Eklund and Jackson, 1983). Each of the general dimensions and higher order themes are discussed below (see Figure 8.2 and Table 8.3).

RAW DATA THEMES	HIGHER ORDER THEMES	DIMENSION
• Assess the benefits to the business of resolving conflict one way or another • Need to increase competitive advantage • Organisational structure and nature of the task are key variables • De-layering of hierarchies opens up Communication • Personal power is a key variable	STRUCTURAL	**ORGANISATIONALLY BASED**
• Difficult situations may cause delay in taking action in conflict situations • Use co-operative approaches • Assess the importance and seriousness of the issue in deciding response • Unless you are sure of your ground, employ a cautious approach • Avoid conflict if things are under control – let things take their course	PROBLEM SOLVING	
• Take team views into account • Refocus conflict to diffuse from people • Emphasis team cohesion; don't pressure people – operate 'opt out' clauses • Keeping staff happy underlies the basic approach • Use conflict to push people to think for themselves • The personalities involved influences the approach • Use the principle of 'x2 sides to every story' in resolving individual conflicts • Employee's response to • autocratic/democratic styles informs response • Consult before implementing change	CONCERN FOR PERSONNEL	**HUMAN RELATIONS BASED**

• Enjoying life is the priority – others' views are not important • Growing up has changed approach to 'hands-off' • Approach mediated by a view of the manager as a developer of people • Wishing to avoid conflict drives the approach • Act as a mediator • Fear of things going wrong drives response • Forces background helps disciplinarian approach • Family background is significant • Listening is important • Personal morals = a factor in responses to conflict • Separate work and personal conflict • Staying in control mediates approach	INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	**HUMAN RELATIONS BASED (cont'd)**
• Use experience to determine approach • Data rationalises actions • Use different people's approaches and mould to individual needs • Use tacit knowledge • Use understanding of others • Learn from mistakes • Maximise own personality factors to ensure positive impact • 'Hindsight' informs approach • From past experience, conflict handling is a damage limitation exercise • Not all conflict is the same • Organisational structure is a key factor • Experience informs the need to communicate in conflict situations • Listening approach is based on experience	KNOWLEDGE	**EXPERIENTIAL**
• Political background is significant • Management training courses have informed approach • Experience and training are the 2 key variables	TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT	

Figure 8.2 Underlying factors influencing decisions about conflict handling reported by managers in response to video clips 1-4. Question One (n=18)

Table 8.3 Number and percentage of managers (n=18) providing raw data themes falling into major categories. Underlying factors influencing decisions about conflict handling reported by managers in response to video clips 1-4
Question One (n=18)

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Organisationally based	12	66.7
Structural	12	66.7
Problem Solving	5	27.8
Human Relations Based	15	88.3
Concern for Personnel	11	61.1
Individual Factors	10	55.5
Experiential	13	72.2
Knowledge / Experience	13	72.2
Training and Development	5	27.8

Organisationally Based. This dimension was reported by 12 managers (66% of the sample) and referred to factors connected with the nature of work organisations. The most frequently referred to higher order theme within this dimension was "structural". This category simply referred to factors influencing subject's approaches derived from the structure of their organisations. This higher order theme was reflected in comments such as:

> My approach comes from a bit of personality and a bit of the organisation I have worked in for fifteen years. It probably gets to you a certain extent like you know the lack of ability to implement major changes makes you less inclined to do it, because you know all you will do is hit brick walls and in the end, you just give up hitting brick walls and things like that. With this job, I do the targets and the benchmarks are all so demanding. I can't put everything on hold for two months while I rearrange the whole structure.

The second higher order theme within the dimension of Organisationally based was "problem solving". This category referred to approaches mediated by a concern to

solve problems in order to gain constructive outcomes. Five participants (27%) made comments abstracted into this higher order theme:

> As far as policy decisions at branch level are concerned, obviously, the bank is a big organisation. What is sent down from head office we have to implement. If you are looking at the day to day running of the office, we were finding that we had queues of customers waiting to see the customer services officers. So our response to that was to look back at office duties that people were doing for several years and reorganising things so that they were still carrying out back office duties but were on call to serve customers as needed.

Human Relations Based. This dimension was considered to encompass factors to do with interpersonal relationships. Fifteen managers (88% of the sample) reported variables conceptualised under this category. The most frequently referred to higher order theme was "concern for personnel". One manager explained their response to conflict as follows:

> It is all about communicating. I think it is coming up the ranks because I have been there and I have been one of those people who has been put down and not asked how I feel about this and why did I do something, but now I am in a management role that is what I do and that is my normal reaction both in and out of work.

The higher order theme of "individual factors" included particular characteristics of individuals or groups which influenced managers' approaches. Commenting on the individual conflict portrayed in clip four, one respondent said:

> Well basically everybody in life has got their own limitations, some people are more outgoing and some have got more athletic prowess, some people are quieter and more timid. So in my experience of life, everyone is different, everyone has their own limitations so you can't group everyone together and expect the whole team to do one specific task, because everyone is different so you have to find out what the individual's capabilities are and then bear that in mind whatever you give them to do in the future.

Experiential. This dimension was reported by 13 managers (72% overall) and was intended to reflect responses to conflict derived from knowledge, experience or training and development activities. Evidence of this was abstracted from comments such as:

> Well, basically it is just common sense. If you are running a business, if something does happen like that it is going to affect your business. In my own personal experiences and in the past we have had situations at a gym facility where people have been upset with other members of the public. It is just experience because it has happened to me a few times before.

The higher order theme of "training / development" was mentioned by 27% of participants. One manager talked about his approach to inter-organisational conflict as follows:

> I suppose I am suggesting my approach comes from experience, but in the sense of having done one or two management courses, it's the difficulty of understanding, or trying to get staff to understand. You know that basically either from your experience or indeed, some various training that you have to go through an intense period of staff development. I suppose it is experience, and it's some training.

Question Two (Levels of Conflict)

Figure 8.3 reports responses to Question Two in which managers were asked if they had encountered work conflict at the four levels represented in the video clips (i.e inter – organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual). For each level of conflict, managers identified the skills used and any underlying factors influencing their approach. Fifty-five raw data themes were extracted from the interview transcripts regarding components of conflict handling skills. Subsequently, these raw data themes were compiled into five higher order themes and from these, two general dimensions were constructed. The higher order dimensions represented discrete but interrelated variables and all of the responses are represented. The dimensions arrived at were (a) generic approaches and (b) specific approaches. The five higher order themes under the dimension of "generic approaches" were 1) problem solving / decision making approaches, 2) development of creative, co-operative processes and 3) competitive approaches. Under the dimension of "specific approaches", two higher order themes were constructed. These were labelled 1) step – by - step, and 2) rooted in the conflict level. Table 8.4 reports the number and percentage of managers employing specific or generic approaches, subdivided by the four conflict levels.

Table 8.5 highlights the number and percentage of managers who identified each of the dimensions and higher order themes. As with the previous set of results, the total number appearing within a particular dimension may exceed the total numbers reporting that dimension as participants tended to report more than one component as being significant. Each of the dimensions and higher order themes are discussed below (see Figure 8.3 and Tables 8.4 and 8.5).

RAW DATA THEMES	HIGHER ORDER THEMES	DIMENSION
• Involve 3rd party as a mediator if unable to solve conflict • Make decisions and apply them honestly within the rules • Set up a working party to interface between those in conflict • Make a triangle out of the problem (but don't get in the middle) • Find out the strengths/weaknesses of opponents to strengthen your own position • Get information about the opposition • Stop conflicts escalating • Foresee conflicts and anticipate them • Use avoidance and sell solutions to conflicting parties as if they came up with the idea • Use a strategic approach • Use tacit knowledge • Use legal measures and work procedures • Investigate conflict to identify the real issues	PROBLEMS SOLVING/ DECISION MAKING	**GENERIC APPROACHES**
• Reach a compromise • Increase communication • Encourage co-operation and decrease competition • Act to make the conflict productive • Forge competitive – co-operative links • Get parties talking straight away to enable compromise • Build bridges over areas of mutual agreement • Use co-operative approaches based on 'modelling' of other managers behaviour • Intervene to get parties to understand the problem and the effects their roles/approaches are having	DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE/COOPERATIVE PROCESSES	

• Use influencing skills • Build support networks • Get parties to generate own solutions • Act as a mediator to get to the root of the conflict (beyond personality differences)	DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE/COOPERATIVE PROCESSES (cont'd)	**GENERIC APPROACHES (cont'd)**
• Use persuading/influencing skills to win the conflict • Keep information on new products secret • Work to achieve 'good natured competition' • Get better at what you do to stave off competition	COMPETITIVE APPROACHES	
• Adjust approach depending upon a) the parties involved and b) what you want • Get parties to pause, (count to 10), then look at solutions • Break the problem down into bits, then chip away at it to get to the core • Firstly, discuss the conflict to calm the situation down • If the conflict involves violence, invoke disciplinary procedures • Investigate covert conflict so that the real issues can be exposed • Use a step-by-step approach to enable productive outcomes	STEP-BY STEP APPROACHES (PROGRESSIVE)	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES**
<u>INTER-ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT</u> • Offer a 'service' to suppress conflict • Find areas of few competitors and big markets • Get information about competitors on an ongoing basis • Corner the market and offer something that competitors don't • Use conflict as a motivator to achieve better results • Engage in competitive – co-operative alliances	ROOTED IN THE CONFLICT LEVEL	

INTER-GROUP CONFLICT • Source out the leader in the group to sort the conflict out • Encourage co-operative approaches • Begin by talking to parties (but recognise when this doesn't get results)	ROOTED IN THE CONFLICT LEVEL (cont'd.)	**SPECIFIC APPROACHES (cont'd.)**
INTRA-GROUP CONFLICT • Contain conflict to stop it spreading beyond the group • Fight for resources and make effective arguments • Try not to be too negative when the conflict is generated from organisational and personal objectives • Be seen to be totally impartial (even if you are not) • Try and understand the misunderstandings • Get parties to generate a solution		
INDIVIDUAL CONFLICT • Have a loud, clear conflict in front of others • Try and diffuse the situation • Avoid individual conflict		

Figure 8.3 Components of Conflict handling skills reported by managers in response to inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual conflict at work. Question Two (n= 18)

Table 8.4 Number and percentage of managers (n = 18) employing specific or generic approaches, subdivided by conflict level. Question Two (n=18)

Conflict Scenario	**Generic Approaches**		**Specific Approaches**		**Combination of Specific Approach with Generic Rationale**	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
1 – INTER-ORGANISATIONAL	4	22	10	55	2	11
2 – INTER-GROUP	5	27	6	33	2	11
3 – INTRA-GROUP	3	16	11	61	1	5
4 – INDIVIDUAL	3	16	11	61	4	22
N.B. 2 Managers = didn't experience inter-organisational conflict 5 Managers = didn't experience inter-group conflict 3 Managers = didn't experience intra-group conflict						

Table 8.5 Number and percentage of managers providing raw data themes falling into major categories. Approaches to Conflict Handling reported by managers in response to inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual conflict at work
Question Two (n=18).

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Generic Approaches	8	100.00
Development of Creative / Co-operative processes	11	61.1
Competitive Approaches	10	55.5
Problem Solving / Decision Making	9	50.0
Specific Approaches	13	72.2
Step – by - Step (progressive)	9	50.0
Rooted in the Conflict Level	7	38.8

Generic Approaches. This dimension was considered to reflect responses to conflict which were applied across a range of conflict situations. The most frequently referred to higher order theme within the dimension of generic approaches was "development of creative, co-operative processes" Eleven managers (61%) made comments conceptualised under this category, which reflected skills which were deployed to enable constructive outcomes. One manager demonstrated the use of this approach as follows:

> There are always people who feel that their way of doing things should be adopted to the detriment of someone else's preferred style and as a manager, I face a lot of difficulty finding my way through and compromising. All things being equal, one doesn't want to be too negative to people, even if you don't like the outcome they are proposing.

The theme of "competitive approaches" referred to skills applied to "win" the conflict and ten managers (55% of the sample) mentioned this variable as being significant. One manager utilised this technique in the following way:

> I am looking to buy a piece of land and put housing on that land. In order for me not to pay more than the next chap, I have got to establish that I can provide larger properties to make more money. So I have to come up with all the whys and wherefores of attributing more coverage to the site than the chap next door, who I am in conflict with because we may be in a tender or

> auction type situation where he is offering x amount of money and I have got to match or better it. In other words, I am trying to belittle his proposals on the back of the strength of mine, so there is conflict.

The higher order theme of "problem solving / decision making" referred to skills which were driven by a need to implement decisions to achieve productive outcomes. This theme was reported by nine managers (50% of the sample) and evidenced from the following description in which one subject described his approach to inter–organisational conflict:

> I felt the need to systematically investigate the market for degrees to study, what other universities were offering, how successful they were, to get hold of copies of their syllabi and documents, to make sure we know everything about what the competitors were doing before we launched our own degrees and we would try to find areas to enter where there were very few competitors and a big market. We did this very successfully at least five times when I was in my head of department role.

Specific Approaches. Thirteen managers (72% of the sample) reported skills conceptualised under this dimension which categorised responses to conflict mediated by situational factors. Descriptions of components identified by managers under the higher order theme of "step-by step" concerned skills application which was staged or progressively applied. Indeed, some respondents described their approaches in terms of "if...then..." sequences, where certain conditions or situational variables determined their response. Fifty percent of managers made comments in this category and an example of this approach was abstracted as follows:

> Once you've identified the conflict, first of all you need to talk to both sides and see if you can get anything out of them. Hopefully, they will admit that something is not quite right. Then, just try and get them together so that you can referee and get them to come to some sort of agreement, rather than having to force them (which can be the case). This is not as good – keep them talking.

The higher order theme "rooted in the conflict level" referred to skills applied according to the level at which conflict was present. Seven managers (38%) made

comments in this category, and example of which was described in the following way:

> I'm trying to manage projects in Indonesia, Bulgaria, Greece – with a very small team. I can't be everywhere. Sometimes, conflict arises because I'm not there all the time and I can't talk face to face with people. You can resolve so much more face to face over a curry, a beer or whatever. In a fax at 8am in the morning, you can't always convey the same message.

Figure 8.4 reports the findings from question 2 relating to underlying factors influencing decisions about conflict handling. Thirty eight raw data themes were compiled into five higher order themes and from these, three higher order dimensions were constructed. These were (a) organisationally based (b) human relations based and (c) experiential. These categories represented distinct albeit interrelated variables which were described as being significant in skills application. The five higher order themes were 1) structural, 2) problem solving, 3) concern for personnel, 4) individual factors and 5) knowledge.

Table 8.6 highlights the numbers and percentage of managers who reported each of the dimensions and higher order themes. In common with the earlier results, several participants described more than one factor as being important, and thus the overall figure for a dimension may exceed the numbers of managers who reported it. Each of the general dimensions and higher order themes are discussed below (see Figure 8.4 and Table 8.6).

RAW DATA THEMES	**HIGHER ORDER THEMES**	**DIMENSION**
• Growth of the organisation influences approach • Gain a clear understanding of conflicts in political terms • Understand how people work in organisations • Approach to feedback on behalf of the organisation mediates response • Having to 'tell' rather than 'ask' gives rise to conflict and causes escalation through teams • Company culture influences the approach	STRUCTURAL	**ORGANISATIONALLY BASED**

• Nature of the industry changes the range of approaches used • As a third party mediator, no proof of the conflict leaves your hands tied • Position changes depending upon the point at which the conflict is entered (on behalf of the manager)	STRUCTURAL (cont'd)	**ORGANISATIONALLY BASED (cont'd)**
• Let the conflict 'run' then decide what to do • Talk to parties to resolve the whole conflict • Use conflict to gain insight • Try and get a 'win-win' outcome (but this is difficult) • Use productive outcomes to drive conflict resolution between individuals rooted in personality differences	PROBLEM SOLVING	
• Develop co-operative approaches – no 'us vs. them' • Work with the resources you have – particularly the people • Use empathy • Maintain productive work relationships for positive outcomes • Talk and listen to conflicting parties • Resolve conflict in stages without telling people what to do	CONCERN FOR PERSONNEL	**HUMAN RELATIONS BASED**
• Be tactful, try and remain neutral as far as possible • 'Soft' approach makes for ineffective conflict handling • Approach is based on a misplaced battle for what is right • Preferred response is influenced by the relative power of influencing people • Avoid individual (personal) conflict • Act as a mediator/diplomat	INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	
• Use life experiences to think of a range of possible ideas • Observation mediates response • 'Trial and error' underlies approaches • Industry-specific problems influence actions • Mistakes in the past change responses in the present • If conflict isn't stopped, it will escalate (derived from experience) • Work experience informs approach • 'Model' approach on other managers • Knowledge of competition is significant	KNOWLEDGE	**EXPERIENTIAL**

• 'Sheer pragmatism' drives response • Underlying rules of 'natural justice' prevail • Use tacit knowledge to generate appropriate conflict handling behaviours	KNOWLEDGE (cont'd)	**EXPERIENTIAL (cont'd)**

Figure 8.4 Underlying factors influencing decisions about conflict handling reported by managers in response to inter-organisational, inter-group, intra group and individual conflict at work.
Question Two (n=18)

Table 8.6 Number and percentage of managers providing raw data themes falling into major categories. Underlying factors influencing decisions about conflict handling reported by managers in response to inter-organisational, inter-group, intra group and individual conflict at work
Question Two (n=18)

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Organisationally Based	15	88.3
Structural	12	66.7
Problem Solving	8	44.4
Human Relations Based	16	88.8
Individual Factors	13	72.2
Concern for Personnel	7	38.8
Experiential	11	61.1
Knowledge	11	61.1

Organisationally Based. In this category, managers identified factors connected with organisational configurations or work arrangements and this dimension was reported by 15 managers (88% of the sample). The most frequently referred to higher order theme in this dimension "structural", which simply referred to ways in which organisational structures impacted upon approaches to conflict. Twelve respondents (66%) made comments abstracted into this higher order theme which was evidenced from the following manager quotation:

> I am stuck as far as resources are concerned. I only have fifty people to work with here. There may be certain times of the week where there is more pressure on one department than there is on another department and you are looking at me having to pull someone across from a quiet department to help.

> My issues are customer service, the phones are ringing, and not being answered and there is conflict between the team leaders about how the resource can be managed.

The second higher order theme in the dimension of Organisationally based was "problem solving" which was mentioned by 44% of managers. This category included issues which influenced the application of conflict handling skills. One manager described his approach to individual conflict in the following way:

> The best way (and there is only one way to sort this out) is to say "look, this isn't working. Let's first of all sit down, let's recognise why we are not working together, once we recognise why that is, we can actually set up some sort of agenda of how we can start working together. We need to understand what our objectives are and you can tell me where your problems are". It may mean getting to the root cause of the problem.

Human Relations Based. This dimension was considered to reflect interpersonal concerns or variables derived from individual differences and was cited by sixteen managers (88% of the sample). It emerged from the second order themes of "individual factors" and "concern for personnel" and was comprised of twelve raw data themes. In the higher order theme of "individual factors", one manager indicated:

> It may mean taking an element out of a group because sometimes if it is a personality thing no matter what you do and how many times you take them out to the pub you just aren't going to get on and you have got to look for the overall good of the group. The worst case scenario is where you remove somebody from the organisation.

The higher order theme "Concern for Personnel" was cited by 38% (or seven) respondents. Examples of these factors included the following:

> I try and get both sides in a conflict sort it out. I try to sit them down and talk to one another. For me, this is the best way – to bring it out into the open. It's not an easy thing to do. You can't change people. I don't force people who don't like working with one another to work together. I will try and find a compromise. That's the best way to resolve things.

Experiential. This dimension was cited by eleven managers (61% of the sample) and consisted of variables to do with the knowledge base underlying skills application. The higher order theme of "knowledge" included the following example from one manager, who appeared to be alluding to the use of tacit knowledge in skills deployment:

> I have seen my approach get results. Well, I mean the message I am trying to get across is that is what I have always done. At the end of the day as a sales minded person, that is what it is all about, getting the best possible result. I don't know where that approach has come from, I can't remember.

Similarly another manager said:

> Just because I have done a DMS doesn't mean that I am equipped to deal with these sorts of things. So it could be my training or experience, but I am adding another element now and that is common sense in how you approach things – a kind of feel for it sort of thing.

Question Three (Similarity between Approaches to the Video Scenarios and Approaches to Managing Conflict at Work)

For question three, managers were asked to account for the degree of perceived similarity between their skills in hypothetical and real life situations. Table 8.7 summarises managers' responses regarding their approaches to the four video clips and the work conflict scenarios. Table 8.8 shows the number and percentage of managers reporting perceived similarities and differences in response to the four video clips for question three.

Tables 8.7 and 8.8 show that for this sample at least, there was a clear level of equivalence between the approaches identified in response to the video clips and the work scenarios. In the category of inter-organisational conflict, thirteen managers (72% of the sample) said that they would react similarly. For inter-group conflict twelve participants (66%) reported comparable skills and in respect of inter-group conflict, fourteen managers (77%) said likewise. The highest degree of equivalence was perceived for the individual category, in which 94% of the sample said their approach would be the same.

Table 8.7 Summary of managers' responses regarding the degree of similarity between approaches to conflict in four video scenarios and four work situations i.e. inter-organisational, inter-group, intra–group and individual
Question Three (n=18).

NB √ = represents all categories of conflict unless otherwise stated

MANAGER	YES	Similarities	NO	Differences
1	√	Acts as mediator		
	√	Pragmatist and activist. Matches approach to others for effective outcomes		
3	√	Uses specific approaches Avoids dealing with individual conflict		
4	√	Evaluates the problem for (action based) radical solutions		
5	√	Uses a step-by step approach		
6	√	Concern for staff is important		
7	√ Individual	Has experienced this type of conflict at work	√ Inter group Intra Group Inter-org - anisational	Video conflicts = Unlike those dealt with at work
8	√	Uses the same approach to all work conflict – compromise		
9	√ inter-organisational Individual (no experience of inter-group and intra group)	Tries to foresee potential conflicts before they happen		
10	√	Years of experience informs approach		
11	√ intragroup individual	Responds rationally to circumstances of different situations	√ Inter-org-anisational inter group	Would have used conflict as a learning experience
12	√	Democratic style, uses a step-by-step approach		
13	√	Matured as a manager and has changed approach to be rational – has learned by mistakes		

14			√	Work is more involved than hypothetical situations Outsiders will find it easier to deal with conflict
15	√ Intra group Individual	Learned from experience	√ Intergroup Inter-organisational	No matter what you do, you'll never be right
16	√ Individual	Identify the problem, then talk about it	√ Intergroup Intragroup Inter-organisational	Industry specific rules and regulations determine the approach
17	√	Broad world view is shaped by the nature of the work organisation		
18	√	Uses a 'tool bag' of behaviour which are derived from experience		

Table 8.8 Summary of similarity / differences between managers' responses to conflict in four (hypothetical) video scenarios and four (actual) work situations
Question Three (n=18)

Type of Conflict	Similarities		Differences	
	No	%	No	%
Inter-organisational	13	72	5	27
Inter-group	12	66	6	27
Intra-group	14	77	4	16
Individual	17	94	1	5

Question Four (Additional Levels of Conflict)

Question Four asked managers to identify any additional levels of conflict apart from those of inter-organisational, intra and inter-group and individual. Table 8.9 reports all of the responses to question Four.

Table 8.9 Summary of managers' responses regarding additional levels of conflict not covered by the classification of inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual. Question Four (n=18)

Manager	Agree with the conflict classification?	Additional categories?
1	√	• None
2	√	• Individual conflict within oneself
3	√	• None
4	√	• Pre – engineered conflict e.g. redundancies
5	√	• None
6	√	• Covert conflict (difficult to identify) • Conflict rooted in power differences
7	√	• Competition / co-operation based conflict (trades unions / lobbying
8	√	• None
9	√	• None
10	√	• Conflict rooted in power differences
11	√	• Individual vs. a group in conflict (one vs. many)
12	√	• None
13	√	• Small group conflict (within a larger group)
14	√	• Conflict rooted in power differences
15	√	• Conflict rooted in power differences
16	√	• Rank, power, status based conflicts
17	√	• The linkage between categories is critical
18	√	• Conflict within oneself

As the table shows, all of the participants (n=18) agreed with the conflict classification that had been adopted. Some additional categories were also suggested which included conflict rooted in power differences (n=5) and intra–individual conflict (n=2).

In response to the second part of question four: "taking all the conflict levels we've talked about into consideration, which is the most common in your experience?" the results were collated according to managerial level. Tables 8.10 and 8.11 show these data.

Table 8.10 Summary of managers' responses to the most common types of perceived work conflict organised by managerial level
Question Four (n=18)

Manager	Level	M/F	Inter-org	Inter-group	Intra-group	Individual
1	JUNIOR	F				√
2	MIDDLE	M	√			
3	MIDDLE	M				√
4	MIDDLE	M				√
5	SENIOR	F		√		√
6	SENIOR	M		√		
7	MIDDLE	M			√	
8	MIDDLE	M				√
9	SENIOR	F	√			
10	JUNIOR	M				√
11	SENIOR	F				√
12	JUNIOR	F				√
13	MIDDLE	M				√
14	JUNIOR	M				√
15	MIDDLE	M			√	√
16	MIDDLE	M				√
17	SENIOR	M				√
18	MIDDLE	F				√

Table 8.11 summarises the results regarding the most common types of conflict experienced by managers, organised by managerial level.

Table 8.11 Summary of managers' responses regarding the most common types of perceived work conflict.
Question Four (n=18)

Managerial level	Inter-org	Inter-group	Intra-group	Individual
SENIOR (n=5)	1	2	0	3
MIDDLE (n=9)	1	0	2	7
JUNIOR (n=4)	0	0	0	4

As the results demonstrate, the most common conflict type reported by managers was individual. Overall, fourteen managers (77% of the sample) said that they experienced conflict on a one-to-one basis.

Question Five (Previous Training in Conflict Management)

For question five, participants were asked if they had ever received training in conflict management. Table 8.12 shows the results.

Table 8.12 Summary of managers' responses to whether they had received training in conflict management
Question Five (n=18)

Manager	YES	Useful?	NO	To include?
1			√	• Dealing with conflict via role plays
2	√	• Yes; role plays were very effective		
3			√	• Advice for dealing with difficult customers
4			√	• Training in conflict recognition
5			√	• Dealing with individual conflict with customers
6			√	• Being calmer in conflict
7	√	• Yes; role plays used		
8			√	• Dealing with all categories of conflict, using different conflict handling styles
9	√	• No; an assertiveness exercise with very little follow up		

10			√	• Analysis of conflict situations, potential effects of conflict management approaches and understanding own reactions
11			√	• Dealing with different categories of conflict using different conflict handling styles
12	√	• Yes; role plays useful in dealing with different styles of conflict handling		
13			√	• Developing staff in conflict management roles
14	√	• Yes; has run courses in conflict management		
15	√	• No. Role plays were not helpful in dealing with difficult customers		
16			√	• Negotiation skills, resolving conflict as a 3rd party, developing compromise
17			√	• Handling intra-group conflict
18	√	• Yes, but training was quite general. More specific would be useful		

As the results demonstrate, seven managers (38%) had received training in conflict management, of which five (27%) had found it useful. There were mixed responses on the value of role plays to increase competence. It was also interesting to note that eleven managers (61% of the sample) had never received any training and a number of additional development needs were identified. Overall, a clear message emerged about the lack of skills training, especially given the eclectic nature of the sample.

8.5 Discussion

The inductive analysis of emergent themes identified many factors as significant in the process of conflict regulation and, consequentially, its' subsequent development. For this study, the interview technique was used to measure what managers *say* they

perceive and, although there were a number of opportunities to probe and clarify these reactions, this aspect was acknowledged to be a limitation of the chosen methodology. However, the interview technique was deemed appropriate to collect information that is not directly observable and it also allowed for a degree of rapport to be established between the interviewer and the interviewee which may facilitate the collection of additional information (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994). Thus, a key and initial assumption was that conflict situations are dynamic and complex and hence the value of using a qualitative approach is derived from the flexibility that it facilitates in exploring the complexity of the conflict management process (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

Objective One: To determine the knowledge base (and any underlying factors) influencing managers' decisions about conflict handling.

The interviews revealed a number of influencing factors that cut across the entire work environment. In respect of the components of conflict handling skills, managers reportedly utilised both generic and specific approaches in their skills application and in sum these findings strongly support the notion of strategic and tactical approaches being necessary for conflict regulation (Rubin, Pruitt and Hee Kim, 1994). Notably, many of the participants reported using combinations of both, and this was an interesting finding to emerge from the data - particularly in view of the lack of discussion about the skills issue in the conflict handling literature (Deutsch, 1994). In the knowledge category, managers' discussed the ways in which knowledge was used to inform their actions and this finding, together with the evidence that strategic and tactical approaches were being utilised, suggests that declarative and procedural knowledge may provide a basis for skills application (Burke and Collins, 1998). There was also some evidence of tacit knowledge being used as a foundation for skills deployment, although more research would be required to establish the nature of this interaction. The results are also consistent with the notion that managers require knowledge as well as skills practice in order to effectively respond to conflict (Deutsch, 1994). Of course, it may be that a combination of strategic and tactical approaches (including the base of declarative and procedural knowledge) could represent the best way to facilitate competence in important managerial skills such as

conflict handling. However, current research in conflict management offers little or no guidance as to the optimum approaches, or the associated learning environments that training providers should use. Overall, these findings provide further evidence about the complexity of the conflict regulation process (Van di Vliert, *et. al.*, 1999) and the need for more research into the behavioural effects of managers' interventions.

Objective Two: To establish categories of conflict based on managers' experience in business and to compare these categories with those proposed anecdotally in the literature

The findings of this investigation also indicate that conflict occurs at different organisational levels. Thus, the results support the categories suggested in the literature, namely, that conflict is present between organisations (Sundaram and Black 1992), within and between groups (Bettenhausen and Murnighan, 1991) and between individuals (Davidson, 1990). All of the managers sampled in this investigation (n=18) agreed with the categories of inter-organisational, inter / intra-group and individual and this classification closely corresponds to that suggested by conflict theorists.

In contrast however, no clear pattern emerged from the data concerning the relationship between managerial role and conflict level. Both senior and junior managers alike reported experiences of conflict in all of the categories represented by the raw data themes and thus, no clear trend was evident. However, as Table 8.10 demonstrates, fourteen managers (77% of the sample) reported experiences of individual conflict. This finding may be accounted for by the fact that many of the senior managers interviewed were in charge of small businesses and therefore assumed a wide range of duties and responsibilities. Thus it is feasible that these circumstances may have rendered them more susceptible to conflict at all levels. Another possible reason may be the changing nature of organisations. There is currently a consistent set of messages in the literature about the change to flatter, more fluid structures, with responsibility being devolved down the organisation (Drucker, 1986; Handy, 1989). At the same time, environments of continuous change

have meant that people are required to be more flexible and innovative as information flows have increased and channels of communication have opened up. Yet another potential consequence of these changes is that more conflict will surface and there is certainly common agreement that no managerial strategy or organisational design could prevent all conflict from occurring (Goddard, 1986; Alter, 1990). Therefore, additional further research to establish the nature of the relationship between managerial role and conflict level seems warranted.

Objective Three: To specify the perceived sources of skills utilised by managers to deal with conflict at work.

With respect to perceived sources of the skills deployed, managers cited three main variables to be significant. Firstly, structural or organisational factors tended to mediate their actions. Secondly, concern for colleagues was reported as an important underlying factor and thirdly, approaches were identified as being derived primarily from combinations of knowledge and experience. These findings are consistent with the notion that conflict regulation is a fluid, dynamic process, involving a number of complex variables (Tjosvold, 1997; Van di Vliert, *et. al.*, 1999). Indeed, the fact that previous experience was perceived as significant provides further support for the essential role of knowledge in skills development (Mumford, 1997), although this combination has rarely been investigated in the conflict handling literature (Deutsch, 1994).

In terms of the framework (see Figure 5.1), the deductive analysis suggests that both declarative and procedural knowledge provide a basis for skilled performance in conflict handling. Notably, these findings provide a clear message concerning the use of strategic and tactical approaches to regulate conflict levels to optimum, applied across a range of conflict scenarios and levels. In sum, the results link two types of knowledge (i.e. declarative and procedural) to strategic and tactical skills deployment and this is consistent with the concepts outlined in the framework. Overall, the study has provided new information about the influencing variables perceived to be significant in determining managers' responses to work conflict. Data have also been compiled about the levels of conflict encountered at work and the range of skills that

may be utilised. An important additional contribution concerns clarification of the underlying factors influencing particular approaches, including the perceived sources of skills deployment. Thus, the results from Studies One and Two are clearly consistent with these findings although the data from this phase of the investigation do not enable the declarative - strategic and procedural - tactical continuum to be linked to the degree of transfer that may be expected. Hence these findings pertaining to the process of conflict regulation provide an important foundation for the final phases of the fieldwork (Studies Four and Five) which focus upon the development of conflict handling skills.

Chapter Nine

Study Four – Semi Structured Interviews with Outdoor Managament Development Providers

9.1 Introduction

The investigations thus far have concentrated upon the nature and process of conflict handling, with the aim of confirming or otherwise refuting the concepts that are represented (see Figure 5.1). Consequently, Study One investigated the extent to which management development providers employed a declarative or procedural focus in respect of skills development, whilst Study Two was designed to identify the skills used and to establish whether they were generic or specific in their application. In the last chapter, additional information was gleaned about the underlying variables influencing skill deployment and the levels at which conflict occurs. As a result of these investigations, two types of skills (strategic and tactical) were identified and directly related to two types of knowledge (declarative and procedural). It is within this context that the next phase of the fieldwork was initiated and accordingly, the focus turned to OMD provision for the development of these distinct sub-sets. As the literature review in Chapter Two demonstrated, existing research offers little evidence regarding the process by which skills may be developed via OMD programmes or indeed, about the circumstances under which transfer is most likely to occur. Therefore, this study was designed to gather more information about provision for skills development in OMD and to discover the degree of "fit" between such provision and the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work.

9.2 Aims and Objectives

In terms of the concepts represented in the framework, the findings from Studies 1-3 provided useful information about the knowledge and skills used by managers to deal with work conflict. However, it was subsequently deemed necessary to investigate OMD provision for the development of conflict handling skills in order to determine the extent to which tactical or strategic approaches may be adopted and to establish the knowledge base underlying skills deployment. The evidence suggests that there

are few, if any, evaluative frameworks for analysing skills development in OMD and that comparatively little work focuses upon the means by which learning may be achieved. Therefore, data were gathered on the methodologies used by OMD providers to promote the acquisition of conflict handling skills. As an important additional objective, the investigation also focused upon the degree of fit between the skills needed and actual provision.

Finally, contemporary works reveal a lack of empirical evidence to support particular approaches to learning transfer and overall, a lack of information concerning the mechanisms of skills development (Lucas, 1992; Bank, 1994; Hattie, 1997). Indeed, despite the plethora of anecdotal evidence about the benefits of OMD and the recent expansion in provision, there is a dearth of theoretical work in the area and consequently a lack of guidance as to most efficacious methodologies. Hence data collection also focused upon the approaches to learning transfer utilised by providers in order to ascertain the similarity between the skills developed and the skills which were used by managers to deal with conflict in workplace settings.

In summary, this investigation had three key objectives:

- To solicit provider's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD.
- To discover the degree of fit between provision for skills development in OMD and the skills that are used by managers to deal with conflict at work.
- To identify perceived approaches to learning transfer employed by OMD providers.

9.3 Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 10 OMD providers who were selected from The Outdoor Source Book (1995-6). All of the providers were listed under the "Outdoor Management Development" section. Wherever possible, "blue chip" providers were used for the sample, and a degree of quality control was therefore offered. Hence, rather than using smaller companies who run OMD as an interesting sideline, the

sample included dedicated, full time providers who had a record of contracted services to a number of organisations (N.B. Appendix 7 includes the criteria for selection). Each of the providers meeting the criteria for selection were assigned a number which was subsequently entered onto *SPSS for Windows* 9.0 (Chicago, USA). A random sampling of these data produced the final 10 providers.

Development of the Conflict Video and Interview Guide

In common with Study Three, the conflict video was used to provide a basis for the fieldwork. Its purpose was to facilitate the standardisation of data and to provide a methodological link between participant's responses to different conflict situations in this and the previous study (*c.f.* Patton, 1987). The introduction and the technical aspects of the video recording were the same as those reported in section 8.3 of Chapter 8. All participants received a copy of the video two weeks prior to the onset of the investigation and an interview was conducted with each provider after they had watched the video twice.

In addition, an interview guide was developed for data collection in order to provide a framework of themes for subject responses (Robson, 1993). The schedule was also designed to minimise interviewer bias by ensuring that providers were asked the same questions in the same order and standardised probes were used to explore responses that were of significance to the research topic and objectives (Grummitt, 1980). The interview guide included the following questions:

Question 1:

Thinking back to the video you have just seen...

For each clip 1-4, in what ways might your programmes equip managers to deal with the conflicts as portrayed?

General Probes:

What skills would managers learn?

How would they be encouraged to apply these skills - both during the course and when they return to work?

Question 2:

For each clip 1-4, in what ways would your programmes help managers acquire knowledge that might be useful to them in dealing with the conflicts as portrayed?

General Probes:

What kinds of knowledge would managers acquire?

How would they be encouraged to apply this knowledge – both during the course and when they return to work?

Question 3:

In what ways would knowledge be used in skills development?

General Probe:

How do you see the interaction between the knowledge acquired and the skills performed?

Question 4:

In what ways do your courses help manages apply their learning back at work?

General Probes:

What is the rationale for this approach?

Are there any specific features of course design that have been particularly helpful in this respect?

If so, why?

If not, why not?

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main phase of data collection. Its purpose was to test the interview procedure and to eliminate areas of ambiguity so that the respondents would have no problems in understanding the questions. The pilot work

was carried out in two phases. Firstly, two individuals with post-graduate degrees in the social sciences were asked to watch the video and scrutinise the interview schedule (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). For the second phase, two OMD providers were recruited to watch the video and participate in an interview. Following the interview, they were asked to highlight issues that were relevant to a pilot survey such as lack of clarity or lack or relevance of the questions (Veal, 1992). The satisfactory completion of the piloting allowed for the administration of the main fieldwork to be undertaken.

Procedure

Participants were contacted by mail or by phone, informed about the nature of the study and asked to participate. Following this initial contact, they were sent a copy of the video and a covering letter (see Appendix 8 for a copy). All participants signed a consent form prior to the start and were given assurances that the data would remain confidential. The interviews lasted between 35-50 minutes and were conducted personally by the author. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed *verbatim.*

Data analysis

The interview text was content analysed using the procedures recommended by Patton (1990) and Scanlan, Ravizza and Stein (1989). Thus the qualitative research methodology was the same as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Bromley (1986) and Patton (1990). Analysis involved three researchers with a background in qualitative research (including the author) read and re-read all 10 transcripts until they were completely familiar with them. One of these individuals was also used to critically analyse the data for Study 1. Although it could be argued that this may have the effect of magnifying subjectivity, the inclusion of several researchers to achieve consensus on the coding of data may not necessarily divest subjectivity from the process if they have similar viewpoints and theoretical backgrounds (Krane, Anderson and Strean, 1997). Thus in common with all previous studies, potential analyst bias was controlled via an emphasis on critical questioning and research partners acting as 'devil's advocate' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). This is also

consistent with the approach recommended by other researchers who have used this methodology (Gould, Eklund and Jackson, 1983; Gould, Finch and Jackson, 1993). Thus independently, each investigator identified raw data themes (quotes or paraphrased quotes that captured major ideas) characterising each provider's response within sub sections of the interview. Consequently, through extensive discussion, consensus was achieved on an individual profile for each provider as well as a set of raw data themes for each interview. Subsequently, all three investigators discussed the ideographic profiles of each provider and all the raw data themes until consensus was reached (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). When disagreements between investigators emerged, the investigators would read the transcripts again and discuss points of contention. Raw data themes were then compiled across providers resulting in a list encompassing the sum total of responses. Following the general procedures outlined by Gould, Eklund and Jackson (1993), an inductive analysis was then performed to generate common themes. Those of highest abstraction were labelled "dimensions", second order categories were characterised as "higher order themes" and raw data themes comprised the most specific forms of information. Consensus between investigators was reached at all stages of the procedure. As an additional confirmation of the inductive analysis, a deductive procedure was conducted whereby the investigators scrutinised the transcriptions again to verify that all the dimensions and themes were represented.

9.4 Results

Question One (Conflict Handling Skills)

Figure 9.1 shows the 91 raw data themes extracted from the transcriptions for question one which asked providers to identify how their own programmes would develop skills to deal with the conflicts portrayed in the four video clips (i.e. inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual). The raw data themes were compiled into six higher order themes and from these, three general dimensions were constructed. The three dimensions were (a) personality, (b) interpersonal and (c) leadership. These categories were not intended to be mutually exclusive, although they do represent distinct variables that were identified by OMD providers as being significant. The six higher order themes were 1) emotional stability, 2) self-

confidence, 3) strategies for conflict handling, 4) tactics for handling conflict, 5) team development and 6) individual development.

Raw Data Themes	Higher Order Themes	Dimension
• Develop individual responsibility • Manage psychological pressure • Stress management • Dealing with conflicting emotions • Dealing with different perceptions about oneself • Sharing personal issues Developing respect for others ideas/opinions • Reflection	EMOTIONAL STABILITY	**PERSONALITY**
• Knowledge of own skills, reactions, behaviour • Self awareness • Managing personal change • Develop confidence to face conflict • Being open about own conflicts • Increase self esteem • Manage opposing attitudes, beliefs, values • Dealing with (own) empowerment • Risk taking • Developing self control • Managing difficult choices	SELF CONFIDENCE	
• Conflict avoidance • Co-operation • Empathy • Teaching Skills • Building personal relationships • Confidence building • Using trust to reveal conflict • Reflective abilities • Delegating • Supporting • Use different conflict handling styles • Handling difficult interpersonal situations • Problem solving for productive outcomes • Collaboration • Diffusing conflict • Change management • Seeing conflict from 'outside' perspective • Use power for 'win-win' outcomes • Process and implement decisions in groups • Being open to others' views • Influencing • Listening • Feedback skills (giving and receiving) • Relating skills • Appraisal	STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT HANDLING	**INTERPERSONAL**

• Developing approachability • Assertiveness • Develop individual responsibility for self/actions • Active observation • Rapport building • Use of different response styles	STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT HANDLING (cont'd)	**INTERPERSONAL (cont'd)**
• Recognising and interpreting body language • Presentation skills • Asking questions • Anticipating potential conflict • By-passing emotional reactions for rational responses • Use a step-by-step approach • Change responses depending on the situation • Negotiation in competitive situations • Dealing with personality differences • Dealing with cultural change in a global business environment • Managing psychological pressure in unfamiliar situations • Empowering individuals with opposing views • Resolving conflict as a 3rd party • Change individual management style • Change others' management style • Alter others' perspectives/outlook • Assessing others and own needs in conflict • Dealing with existing conflicts • Managing own and others' needs for 'win-win' outcomes • Develop fairness amongst subordinates	TACTICS FOR HANDLING CONFLICT	

• Networking skills • Enhance team spirit • Develop team effectiveness • Achieve team working • Sharing information • Cohesion building • Team empowerment • Recognise others' strengths/weaknesses • Motivating groups	TEAM DEVELOPMENT	**LEADERSHIP**
• Build skills portfolio • Managing intra - personal conflict • Obtain and understand information • Flexibility • Being an effective team member • Being a manager and a leader • Increasing personal contribution/responsibility • Using disclosure (to tutor) • Exploring belief systems • Using visualisation • Develop internal logic • Trainer training	INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT	

Figure 9.1 Components of conflict handling skills reported by providers of outdoor management development in response to video clips 1-4 depicting inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual conflict.
Question 1 (n = 10)

Table 9.1 reports the numbers and percentage of providers who identified each of the dimensions and higher order themes. In common with Study Two and Three, and for all the results within this study, many of the interviewees identified more than one variable as being significant and therefore the numbers appearing in that dimension can exceed the numbers who reported that dimension (Gould, Eklund and Jackson, 1983). Each of the dimensions and higher order themes are discussed below and the numbers and percentage of providers who reported a combination of strategic and tactical approaches are also included. This category refers to providers who mentioned both variables separately during the course of the same interview (see Figure 9.1 and Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Number and percentage of providers reporting raw data themes falling into major categories. Components of conflict handling skills reported by providers of outdoor management development in response to video clips 1-4.
Question 1 (n = 10)

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Personality	5	50%
Emotional Stability	4	40%
Self confidence	3	30%
Interpersonal	10	100%
Strategies for conflict handling	9	90%
Tactics for handling conflict	7	70%
Combination of Strategic and Tactical approaches	4	50%
Leadership	5	50%
Individual development	5	50%
Team development	4	40%

Personality. The dimension of personality was intended to represent perceived skills provision linked to personality factors that were identified as being significant in conflict handling and was cited by five providers (50% of the sample). The most frequently referred to higher order theme in the dimension of Personality was "emotional stability". This simply referred to skills enabling participants to react calmly to conflict situations by making rational assessments to facilitate constructive outcomes. Forty percent of providers made comments conceptualised under this higher order theme. One provider said:

> The requisite skills are to do with people standing up for what they believe. We do a lot of team building and stress management programmes. Some of the things we deal with are degrees of negotiation, diffusing conflict and trying to handle it in a plus / plus way for win – win situations.

In a similar vein, another provider commented:

> We would try and develop skills in the ability to stand back off a situation, not to get too involved, to negotiate, to use their position of power to their advantage but not to abuse it and to be approachable, fair and trustworthy but – at the end of the day, to go in and sort the problem that is the problem.

The second most frequently referred to theme in the dimension of Personality was "self confidence". Three providers (30%) made comments in this category, which was linked to the development of self - assurance in skills deployment. Examples of this theme included the following:

> What we know about the outdoors is that it enhances self - confidence over and above anything and everything else. What else it does is very specific to the individual. The outdoors develops enormously understanding of how people deal with one another.

Similarly, another respondent said:

> People tend to take things from the course about personal belief and awareness. This will cross along all the fields. Conflict handling is easier if you have belief in yourself and your own rights. If you've been on a mountain and you've achieved something, your confidence grows. When you get back to work and you are facing your boss - it's not such a daunting prospect.

Interpersonal. This dimension was cited by all of the OMD providers and represented interpersonal skills perceived to be useful in dealing with conflict. The most frequently referred to higher order theme in this dimension was "strategies for conflict handling" which was cited by 9 providers (90% of the sample). This category referred to generic skills identified as being applicable across a range of conflict situations and represented attempts to develop broad understanding about the process of conflict handling. Comments conceptualised under this classification included the following: "We look at questioning, listening, rapport building, response styles, use of body language – those sorts of things. The message having the meaning that you wanted. Inappropriate messages as well – we look at these".

In a similar vein, another provider commented:

> The idea behind conflict handling is to just alert people to the fact that there is more to it than just hearing the words that people say. Behind it, there is a theme about it and behind it there is a will, even if they may not be saying this. We would develop systems for managing peoples' objections. I might give them the steps to assertiveness but the real knowledge they would have

> gained is about themselves, about how they react, how they can do things. The techniques are utterly useless on their own. The real stuff comes from getting people to know themselves a little bit better. We might also teach them the process of influencing, a way of going through a proper tool or preparation model to help them to think about how they might approach conflict.

The other higher order theme within the dimension of Interpersonal was "tactics for handling conflict". Seven OMD providers (70%) made comments conceptualised under this category which represented conflict handling skills which were situation specific and therefore adjusted according to the circumstances. One provider made the following comment about the skills developed by her company:

> We look at building skills in quite a positive way, so it is getting people to work together on small projects and taking out of these what works well and always as a cycle making the transfer between what happens there in that specific project and what goes on at work. Also, encouraging people to move on to the next level, the next level of communication, possibly surfacing real work issues and not right at the end of the course. We look at what is going on here and now but also make the links between the business here and how it relates back to the workplace.

Leadership. This dimension was cited by five providers (50% of the sample) and represented the development of individual and team based skills relevant to leadership behaviours. The most frequently referred to higher order theme within the dimension of Leadership was "individual development" and in this category, providers identified individual skills perceived to be significant for effective conflict handling. Fifty percent of providers made comments conceptualised under this heading, an example of which was as follows:

> What they (the participants) know, is often more then they think they know. Sometimes, as humans, we tend to react with instinctive behaviour rather than sitting back and taking stock. With the cause and effect problem, a conflict happens and your mind goes round the 'red' route. What we try and do is get them to follow another 'blue' route, which involves a more logical thought pattern. We get people to consider all the things that could go right and wrong. We would introduce this in a workshop where individuals can practice these thought patterns and discuss them and they come up with a case study for a red route situation and then produce a blue route solution.

The other higher order theme in the dimension of Leadership was "team development", referring to team - based skills deemed significant in the process of conflict handling. Four providers (40%) made comments on this issue which was evidenced from the following quotation:

> What we pick out from the activities are the different team members – the planners, the doers etc...and we'll make the team leaders and the members of the team aware of the role they should play within the team. Everyone in the team knows what their roles are e.g. the person who comes up with the whacky ideas and the person who is a natural leader...all we do is fine tune and enhance these aspects and all the different elements to show the weak / strong points of individuals and how this affects the team. We encourage them to change roles, and do things and explain things in different ways to get the team to work as effectively as possible and to deal with any conflicts that arise when they are trying to meet the task.

And similarly:

> My view is you have to address conflict. Otherwise, you are going to come a cropper later on. It is in the early life of a team that they are likely to have to make fundamental decisions about how to move forward with a particular project, or how they are going to work together. This is also when their teamwork is at its most inadequate. – they are least well formed and least mature in their relationships. Often, decisions are pushed through by a small clique of people who know what they want. Others will stay quiet and protest after the decision has been made and when it's going to cost them money if they reverse it. If we can get people to say the things that matter early, then that will provide a bottom line result when it comes round to making some of these fundamental decisions.

Questions Two and Three (Knowledge and Skills Development)

Figure 9.2 reports the provider's responses to questions Two and Three concerning knowledge development. Forty-six raw data themes were extracted from the interviews regarding the knowledge underpinning skills application and subsequently, these raw data themes were compiled into three higher order themes from which the general dimension of "Knowledge" was constructed.

RAW DATA THEMES	HIGHER ORDER THEMES	DIMENSION
• Develop understanding of group interactions • Increase self confidence • Develop self/other awareness • Attitude change • Use existing knowledge in learning • Use existing knowledge in skills practice • Knowledge of giving/receiving feedback • Knowledge of own/others' behaviour • Understand issues from own and others' perspectives • Acquire theory and practice application • Knowledge of value of communication • Knowledge transfer (team to team) • Team roles/responsibilities • Knowledge compilation as a result of individual responsibility • Acquire insight • Develop intent to act	GENERIC	**KNOWLEDGE**
• Develop skills in a team conflict • Use individual conflict handling styles • Enhance specific business knowledge • Relate physical challenge to particular responses • Develop rules for managing objectives • Learn about own reactions to conflict • Use an influencing model • Observe group dynamics - 'ways of watching' • Know own role in a team • Split knowledge into small components • Use knowledge to confront • Appreciate importance of individual conflict scenarios • Use rules to govern skills portfolio • Use steps to build knowledge compilation • Identify individual development areas	SPECIFIC	

• Aim for small improvements in knowledge (1% in all areas) • Embed knowledge in skills practice	SPECIFIC (cont'd)	**KNOWLEDGE (cont'd)**
• Kolb's cycle • Thomas Kilmann Mode • Prisoner's Dilemma • The X-Y game • Conflict resolution questionnaire • Blake & Mouton's Managerial Grid • Psychometric tests NLP • Myers-Briggs personality indicator • Belbin's team roles • Tuckman's Team Development Model • Adair's 3 circles model • Use models that focus on - structure - diversity - interpersonal relationships	THEORETICAL	

Figure 9.2 Underpinning knowledge reported by providers of outdoor management development in response to video clips 1-4 depicting inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual conflict
Questions 2 & 3 (n = 10)

The three higher order themes were 1) generic, 2) specific and 3) theoretical. Table 9.2 reports the number and percentage of providers who cited the dimension and higher order themes for question two in which the figures for providers reporting both generic and specific knowledge are included.

Table 9.2 Number and percentage of providers reporting raw data themes falling into major categories. Underpinning knowledge reported by providers of outdoor management development in response to video clips 1-4 depicting inter-organisational, inter-group, intra - group and individual conflict.
Question 2 & 3 (n = 10)

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	**Number**	**Percentage**
Knowledge	10	100%
Generic	9	90%
Theoretical	8	80%
Combination of generic and specific knowledge	4	40%
Specific	4	40%

Knowledge. This dimension was reported by all 10 OMD providers and referred to the perceived knowledge underlying skills deployment. The most frequently cited higher order theme in this category was "generic", which represented broad knowledge or understanding reportedly developed as a foundation for conflict handling skills. One provider commented upon this aspect as follows:

> Conflict handling is about listening skills - active, effective listening and issues of perception – getting people to look at how people can perceive things in entirely different ways even when the situation is the same. We look at issues of knowledge about how teams work and develop and where conflict is likely to arise in that process – and how normal it is. They will learn the basic skills with us. The true test is when they get back to work – whether those early learned skills become embedded knowledge that they can take out and use as necessary.

And in a similar vein: "I guess the knowledge that we develop is generic knowledge if you like. The knowledge I would say is self-awareness about individuals, awareness about teams, creating knowledge about themselves but also business knowledge".

The second most frequently referred to higher order theme in the dimension of Knowledge was "theoretical". Eight providers (80% of the sample) made comments about this issue which represented theoretical models or tools used to promote skills learning, such as psychometric teats or experiential models. An example of this was conceptualised from comments such as the following:

> In the area of conflict handling, we concentrate on two areas. Firstly, game playing. We use traditional mathematical game playing in the form of the "Prisoners Dilemma" or the "X-Y game". We also use the Thomas and Kilman model which includes five styles of conflict resolution. We rely heavily on this. It's simple to understand and makes the point that there is more than one way of handling conflict. If you are always in one particular style there are times when you are going to get it wrong. If you can flex your style, you are likely to be better off. We give accompanying handouts – it's very simple, not rocket science, but it does represent some theory input.

The higher order theme of "specific" comprised seventeen raw data themes. This category referred to knowledge applied to particular situations or workplace conflict scenarios. Four providers (40% of the sample) made comments conceptualised under this category which was evidenced from the following example:

> It is all very specific to that person or that team, that organisation, that business. Rather than saying "here's a case study about a different organisation or here's a complex management theory that you lot need to understand", it's about generating the links back to work. We use project work to recreate a specific business problem that we know is happening in their organisation. We let the delegates run it and usually they will operate it in the way that they operate in work on that problem. We let them learn from that situation and reapply differences in the way they might go about it and they then go through the process again re applying it to the workplace. We try and make it very specific to the workplace.

Question 4 (Learning Transfer)

Figure 9.3 shows the information extracted from the interview transcripts for question 4 concerning approaches to learning transfer. In this category, providers identified variables used to facilitate skills application at work. Sixty-six raw data themes were compiled into four higher order themes and from these, the dimensions of "Transfer Philosophy" and "Transfer Methodology" were arrived at. The four higher order themes were 1) approaches to learning transfer, 2) development support, 3) low fidelity designs (i.e. programmes which develop broad understanding of principles or structures underlying the process of conflict handling), and 4) high fidelity designs (i.e. courses which emphasise action based methodologies with close linkage to work settings). Table 9.3 reports the number and percentage of providers who identified each of the dimensions and higher order themes, including those who identified a combination of high and low fidelity designs. An interesting additional finding was that two of the providers did not identify either low or high fidelity designs as being significant. Indeed, the same two providers reported that their courses had little or no follow up to facilitate learning transfer, although this factor was acknowledged by them as being important (see Figure 9.3 and Table 9.3).

RAW DATA THEMES	**HIGHER ORDER THEMES**	**DIMENSION**
• Use enjoyment to promote personal change/transfer • Outdoors = susceptible to negative transfer • Let the experience alone promote transfer • Lack of follow-up pre/post course limits transfer • Use review as main tool • 'Top down' (whole company) commitment facilitates transfer • Transfer is dependent on client commitment • Contrast previous and present approaches (what did I do, what will I do now?) • Tutor competence is key to transfer possibilities • Lack of resources of client organisations limit transfer • Course duration is a factor - shorter courses (1-3 days) = more directive, tutor led - longer courses (4-7 days) = less directive, delegate led • Let the client organisation be responsible for transfer • Be organic and flexible in approach • Clients' approach (to management development) is crucial • Make OMD part of a bigger programme • There are no guarantees of transfer, only development opportunities • No reinforcement = no transfer • Use Kolb's model	APPROACHES TO LEARNING TRANSFER	**TRANSFER PHILOSOPHY**

• Use pre and post work to identify objectives • Provide post course support to reinforce learning • Use specific (behavioural) action plans pre & post course • Set up support groups on course • Use post-course questionnaire (after 6 wks) • Develop support network in 'home' organisation • Use coaching to raise client awareness • Use one-to-one interviews to reinforce commitment • Follow up 1 day event (4 wks later) • Set up 'challenge groups' during course and at work • Use long term approach – learning centres at work (after 6 months) • Produce formalised course notes • Write a letter during course, post it to delegate 3 months later • Present/discuss action plans during course • Identify success criteria • Use evaluation forms • Revisit skills 6-12 months later • Provide on-going development opportunities for 3 months • Set up regular meetings at work – every week, 1 hr • Support the integration of new learning (how do you do things differently at the same time as you do the things you did before?) • Get access to the 'shakers & movers' in the organisation • Get delegates commitment to do something • Develop a long term relationship with clients	DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT	**TRANSFER METHODOLOGY**

• Make processes (not tasks) similar to work • Let skills emerge during course • Use physical experiences as a metaphor for skills transfer • Outdoors creates unfamiliar setting for transfer • Build on existing knowledge base • Enhance self confidence • Share intentions about personal change • Create internal desire for development • Think through the implications of proposed changes • Use broad experience to let learning points emerge • Engage in risk assessment (risks at work, risks to personal development) • Identify own learning objectives • Develop individual belief in self and own rights • Develop insight at the level of understanding (not just action)	LOW FIDELITY DESIGNS	**TRANSFER METHODOLOGY (cont'd)**
• Make skills specific • Use skills practice during course to link with work settings • Use constant analogies with work • Use 'live' work problems • Use directive questioning about work issues • Make work links throughout the course (not just at the end) • Design exercises that replicate work scenarios • Apply learning to suit organisational culture and objectives • Develop perceived value of skills (to individuals) • Map skills out clearly • Use clarity of action during course to achieve transfer	HIGH FIDELITY DESIGNS	

Figure 9.3 Approaches to learning transfer reported by OMD providers as being significant in the process of conflict handling
Question 4 (n = 10)

Table 9.3 Number and percentage of providers reporting raw data themes falling into major categories. Approaches to learning transfer reported by OMD providers as being significant in the process of conflict handling
Question 4 (n=10)

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Transfer Philosophy	8	80%
Approaches to Learning Transfer	6	60%
Transfer Methodology	7	70%
Development Support	7	70%
Low fidelity Designs	5	50%
High Fidelity Designs	7	70%
Combination of High and Low Fidelity Designs	4	40%

Transfer Philosophy. In the dimension of transfer philosophy, OMD providers identified techniques used to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills from the outdoor event to the workplace. This category was cited by eight respondents (80% of the sample). Within this dimension, the higher order theme of "approaches to learning transfer" was mentioned by 60% of providers. This category represented the perceived rationale behind particular approaches to leaning transfer. Examples of this theme included the following:

> We advise people at the early stages of returning from a course not to evangelise too much – to remember that some people haven't had the insights that you've had and haven't done the things that you've done. On a face level, some of the insights gained from the outdoor activities have nothing to do with work because the transfer is emotional, intellectual and at a team understanding level – not at the "what we've done" level. Our courses have a high behavioural content. If you ask organisations to change, then change starts with people doing things differently. We're not talking about personality change (I make that distinction) and it has to be a very careful process which is caring of the individual.

In the dimension of Transfer Methodology, the higher order theme of "development support" represented attempts to reinforce skills learning by utilising various support systems. This issue was reflected in comments such as:

> So the problem is: how do you do things differently at the same time as doing the things you had to do before? How do you find a way through that? The biggest problem with transfer is getting the support up and running in the company. The difficult bit in the preparation of the programme is linking it for the individuals so that we can help support the integration of new learning and so there is an established support network to help them with what they've learned. This may be a one-to-one meeting with their boss where they talk through what they've learned and what they want to do with it. This is my preference.

The second most frequently referred to higher order theme in the dimension of Transfer Methodology was "high fidelity designs". Seventy percent of providers mentioned this variable which referred to programmes in which there was a close match between the tasks in the learning domain and those in the work environment. An example of this approach was abstracted from comments such as the following:

> Well it may be that they come to us because there is a problem in the workplace and they want to look at that. In which case, we would be very directive and in this situation we would ask them to relate the outdoor situation to a similar situation in the workplace. Again, by asking, it brings it out of people. I think most people have the answers in their head anyway but they might have difficulty interpreting them and by asking a series of questions and by using good de-briefing we can analyse problems and make things clearer.

And similarly,

> What we can do for a client is to have an exercise which somehow replicates what is going on in work. There was one group who was being set up to work together and there was a certain number of areas they needed to look at. One was that the guy who was going to be managing them had a very traditional way of managing and he needed to be more flexible in his style. So there was an issue around his style and his attitude. I thought well, we can either talk about this, or I could maybe design an exercise that does replicate what it would be like for them in their plant, so this is what I did and it worked extremely well for them because they were able to make those direct links. So, rather than an exercise which is a little like their work place, it is not close enough, so that is something that can really help to make the experience more transferable for them because some people that we work with find it really easy to make the transfer.

Also within the dimension of Transfer Methodology, the higher order theme of "low fidelity designs" was cited by fifty percent of providers. This category referred to programmes in which the emphasis was on matching the cognitive processing requirements of the outdoor tasks with those required in the work setting. One provider described this approach as follows:

> We would have a few kinds of ideas, like for example a system for managing people's objections. People might take a situation they have been through, and described it from another person's point of view in one chair, and then they move to another chair and describe it from another person's point of view and they move to a third chair and give them some advice, so again it is more about seeing yourself from different perspectives and then thinking about how you might manage things in a different way so you are happier and you feel better, even if you don't know what you want. People will pick and choose the skills depending on where they are. I don't believe in teaching specific skills to people anyway, they will choose the skills they need.

The final category in the dimension of Transfer Methodology was "combination of high and low fidelity designs". This variable was cited by four providers (40% of the sample) and referred to course designs utilising both types of approach (see above for specific examples).

In response to the second part of question 4 concerning the features of course design and their function in respect of learning transfer, twenty-six raw data themes were identified. Figure 9.4 reports all of the themes and dimensions cited and Table 9.4 includes the numbers and percentages of providers who identified each of the dimensions and higher order themes which are discussed below.

RAW DATA THEMES	HIGHER ORDER THEMES	DIMENSION
• Deal with core conflicts first, then secondary issues • Design competition into conflict handling events • Use communication, negotiation and bartering for conflict handling • Create opportunities for skills practice • Make the skill specific • Let skills emerge as the course progresses • Use review to refine skills • Link what we know to what we do • Fine tune skills as course progresses	SKILLS BASED	**COURSE DESIGN VARIABLES**
• Concentrate on observable (the 'here & now') • Use challenge by choice • Obtain background information on delegates • Use role plays/observers/video debrief • Rewrite the course as it goes (constant redesign based on constant feedback) • Enable people to see the consequences of actions • Exposing people to the outdoors will effect change • Promote learning by reflective questioning • Courses favour those who like the outdoors	LEARNING APPROACHES	
• Tutor competence = crucial to: - Maintain appropriate level of depth (not psychologists) - Use influence wisely - Gain trust of participants • Don't inform delegates the course is about conflict handling • Course duration is significant: - Longer courses (4-7 days) = more potential for conflict - Shorter courses (1-3 days) = less potential for conflict • Use outdoor environment to heighten emotions • Perceived risk is essential • Bring the subconscious into the conscious (review intentions to change) • Increase levels of challenge as the course progresses • Use manager – centred designs	COURSE RATIONALE	

Figure 9.4 Course design variables identified as being significant in the process of learning transfer reported by providers of outdoor management development Question 4 (n = 10)

Table 9.4 Number and percentage of providers reporting raw data themes falling into major categories. Course design variables identified as being significant in the process of learning transfer reported by providers of outdoor management development
Question 4 (n = 10)

Dimension / Higher Order Theme	Number	Percentage
Course Design Variables	8	80%
Skills Based	8	80%
Learning Approaches	6	60%
Course Rationale	5	50%

Course Design Variables. This dimension was cited by eight providers and referred to features of course design identified as being significant in influencing the process of learning transfer. From the twenty-six raw data themes, three higher order themes were subsequently complied to construct the dimension of Course Design Variables. The higher order themes were 1) skills based, 2) learning approaches and 3) course rationale.

The most frequently referred to higher order theme within the dimension of course design variables was "skills based". This category concerned the issue of skills development and its role in the process of learning transfer. Eight providers (80% of the sample) reported variables conceptualised under this theme. Commenting on this issue, one provider said:

> We set people off on a small exercise early on and then we review and reflect on what's happened. We give them some examples and some theory input. We then allow them to have bigger and longer exercises as the process moves forward and they have to use their skills to negotiate, to change roles etc... We will negotiate with the internal training provider to see what differences they want in the managers' behaviours. If they say they want to look at conflict handling, we will do one design. If they say something more general we might do something else. We also get them to do action planning. What have you learned, What difference will it make? What are you going to do differently and when are you going to do this? What support will you need and how will you get that support?

The higher order theme of "learning approaches" represented the various methodologies identified as noteworthy in respect of learning transfer. One provider elaborated on this aspect:

> We can always tell when someone intellectually understands the theory. For instance the Thomas and Kilman Conflict Model. We can then take this further and say "now you have that perception, is there anything you'd like to be able to do differently?" Then, we base the questioning around what value they see in changing their behaviour. If they go back to an organisation which values competition, then changing their behaviour is not going to give them any personal value. So – they'll fall back into their own style, which is fair enough but what they have got is their own perception that things can be different. Basically, that's all we do. We allow them different contexts – for them to make their own decisions.

The higher order theme "course rationale" represented underlying approaches to skills learning and application. Fifty percent of providers made comments conceptualised under this category which included this example:

> I would say that the main thrust of our programmes is to do with developing skilled behaviour. These skills would include team working. Usually a programme would focus upon getting a group to be able to be completely open and honest with one another so if they have an issue, instead of keeping it covered up we try to bring the atmosphere and environment of the group to where they can share information about any situation. The biggest skill that we pass on is a skill where you can feedback to people and I guess we use feedback a lot on our courses. So the biggest skill in terms of dealing with conflict management is actually giving some feedback and how they can use it to push the organisation forward. The approach is about working through your differences, so we sit down and say what is the problem here?

And, in a similar vein:

> Everything we do is about the learners taking responsibility for their own learning. We make up a tight knit team. We bounce the responsibility for learning back to the participants. They have to come back to us with action plans, points, timetables and schedules about how they are going to apply this to the workplace. We just facilitate a process. We work through the mechanics of the process with the client and we know what our end product should be. What we don't know – is how they're going to apply this in their workplace because we don't know their workplace and a lot of clients won't give you the week or two weeks working in and around the organisation that you would need.

9.5 Discussion

The OMD providers sampled in this investigation identified a number of variables to be significant in the process of skills learning and transfer. In common with Studies Two and Three, the interview technique was used to measure provider's perceptions of provision and thus, a key limitation of the study was that the chosen methodology clarified only what providers *said* was the case. However, the use of the interview method was considered to be advantageous for several reasons. Firstly, the nature of the questions were deemed to be complex and, as Healey, (1991) and Jankowicz (1995) have commented, a semi-structured or in depth interview will be most appropriate for this type of situation. Secondly, as the research methodology is concerned with assessing the applicability of the framework to OMD provision, it is important that the data collection process be used to generate theory which may suggest subsequent, appropriate action to be taken. Thus, the interview method was chosen because it facilitated the collection of in-depth information specifically derived from the events and circumstances of the setting in which the research was conducted (Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1998). Finally, the interview procedure allowed for the theory's generalisability to be tested in other contexts and this approach is consistent with the overall research strategy.

Objective One: To solicit provider's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD.

The OMD providers sampled in this investigation identified a number of variables to be significant in provision for conflict handling and these data are consistent with

messages in the literature about the range of factors influencing conflict regulation (Roloff, 1987; Rahim, 1992; De Dreu, 1997). The responses to question one demonstrated the variety of methodologies employed to develop skilled performance. Overall, half of the respondents (n=5) reported perceived provision linked to personality factors. These included abilities to stand back from conflict situations in order to invoke appropriate responses. Notably in this sample at least, the interpersonal dimension was underlined most strongly, with all 10 providers describing interpersonal skills as being important for skills development. Within this category, nine providers emphasised the use of strategic approaches which referred to the acquisition of generic skills applicable across a range of conflict scenarios and seven providers made comments about the development of specific skills deemed to be contingent upon the situation. It is also interesting to note that four providers stressed the utilisation of both strategic and tactical skills and, under these circumstances, some of the skills were generically applied whilst in others, the approach was dependent upon the situation. Clearly, these perspectives are in accordance with the strategic (one way best) and tactical (contingency) approaches described by a number of writers (e.g. Van di Vliert *et. al.* 1999; Baron, 1997) and highlighted by Studies Two and Three. The dimension of "leadership" was cited by 5 providers (50% of the sample) and represented the development of both individual and team based skills. The higher order theme of "individual development" contained twelve raw data themes and was reported by 50% of the sample. Also within the dimension of leadership, four respondents (40%) described team-based skills to be significant in the process of conflict handling.

Overall, the results from question one support the view of a number of writers who emphasise the complexity of the conflict handling process (Baron, 1997; Feather, 1990; Beer and Walton, 1990; Pondy, 1992; Tjosvold, 1997). The analysis also indicates that both generic and specific skills are a feature of provision for conflict handling, and this idea is consistent with the conceptual underpinnings of theorists who espouse the idea that both strategic and tactical approaches are significant (Womack, 1988; Rubin, Pruitt and Hee Kim, 1994). However, the conflict handling literature contains less coverage about the consequences of the use of one approach

over another, or about the most efficacious methodologies to be used by training providers to develop these behaviours. This problem is also exacerbated by a general lack of coverage about the requisite skills (Deutsch, 1994). Nonetheless, the findings support the broad skills categories suggested by conflict theorists, namely that managers would benefit from abilities enabling co-operative, problem solving approaches and a view of the conflict from an outside perspective (Folberg and Taylor, 1984). It is also suggested that in order to be effective at conflict handling, managers need good interpersonal skills and aptitudes that facilitate constructive decision making processes (Deutsch, 1994). Thus, insofar as these broad skills categories are concerned, the findings are consistent with the literature. Moreover, in-depth examination of the interview scripts revealed both individual and team based skills to be significant and these results support the emphasis on competencies that enable managers to deal with conflict on more than one level at a time i.e. inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual (Lammers, 1990; Tjosvold and Chia, 1989; Rahim, 1992).

The responses to questions two and three rendered three higher order themes subsequently conceptualised under the overall dimension of "knowledge". All of the providers sampled in this investigation (n=10) reported knowledge development to be important. Thus nine OMD providers identified generic knowledge, eight mentioned theoretical knowledge and four discussed the development of specific knowledge. An interesting additional finding was that four respondents revealed a combination of generic and specific knowledge to be significant. Overall, these findings are consistent with views in the literature on cognitive skill acquisition in which the role of knowledge in skilled performance is advocated (Allard, 1993). The analysis also indicates the likely use of both declarative and procedural knowledge in skills development (Anderson, 1982; Starkes and Allard, 1993). Arguably, this idea is in accordance with the findings from question one which suggested that the resultant skills are applied both strategically and tactically. The higher order theme of "theoretical" was intended to represent learning tools or measures used to promote knowledge development and the results for this category suggest that a degree of theoretical knowledge may be useful in the development of skilled performance

(Thomas and Kilman, 1974). Indeed, the use of psychometric measures and game playing which allows for the practice of different conflict handling styles is consistent with the notion of personality factors being significant in conflict regulation (Muniz and Chasnoff, 1989).

There were also some interesting findings in respect of the course design variables deemed to be significant in skills learning. Notably, eighty percent of respondents cited skills development as being a key feature of provision and this finding contrasts strongly to the lack of coverage about the importance of this issue in the conflict handling literature (Deutsch, 1994). In the category of learning approaches, a number of providers alluded to the use of experiential designs and this emphasis is consistent with the use of the outdoors to prompt individuals through the learning cycle (see Figure 2.1). Within the higher order theme of "course rationale", the variables of "tutor competence" and "course duration" featured particularly strongly and it is interesting to note that the literature offers comparatively little guidance as to the effect of these factors on learning outcomes (Lucas, 1992).

Thus these data suggest that OMD providers utilise both declarative and procedural knowledge to underpin the consequent application of strategic and tactical skills and this provides for a good match between perceived provision and perceived need (as identified through Studies Two and Three). However there was less evidence that providers were working from a coherent rationale to promote the acquisition of these skills. Thus whilst a wide variety of knowledge and skills were reportedly developed, the justification for the choice of one course design over another to optimise effect was not clearly articulated by the providers sampled in this investigation. Overall, the linkage between course objectives, the chosen methodology and the resultant learning outcomes did not emerge from the data. Indeed, many of the provider comments suggested a somewhat vague approach to this issue. For example, one respondent said "What we know about the outdoors is that it enhances self-confidence over and above everything and anything else that it does. What else it does is very, very, specific to the individual". In a similar vein, another provider commented:

> If the programme is not done properly, you can put managers in a situation where you scare the wits out of them. All right, they get something out of it, the outdoors is a bit like that. They will change. If OMD is done properly, it is so powerful that for the next three months it will have its own effect.

A third provider said

> Being specific about the programme design is again quite difficult. I certainly feel that you can't set a specific agenda until you know who they are and I don't work to a specific set of rules. So as far as this goes, it is very much a case of playing it by ear.

Thus although there was clear evidence that providers utilised a variety of approaches to develop the requisite knowledge and skills, there was less clarity concerning the application of underlying principles to inform the design of programmes. These statements reflect the commonly held (and previously referred to) "evangelical" view that "it's good for you because it's good!"

In terms of the framework, the analysis indicates the use of a variety of methodologies and approaches. The importance of skills development was clearly underlined, and perceived provision included the use of both declarative and procedural knowledge to inform the deployment of strategic and tactical skills. Consequently, the findings are consistent with those from Studies 1-3, which suggested the development of two types of knowledge linked to two types of skills, sometimes applied in combination. Overall however, there was a lack of evidence concerning the articulation of theory to optimise the learning effect. Thus although the results broadly support the concepts represented in the framework, comments concerning the principles underpinning the application of these concepts were conspicuous by their absence.

Objective Two: To discover the degree of fit between provision for skills development in OMD and the skills that are used by managers to deal with conflict at work.

For this sample at least, there was a clear level of equivalence between perceived provision for skills development in OMD and the skills reportedly used by managers in business. Responses to the conflict video alongside data pertaining to the various approaches employed at work indicated a good degree of fit between the skills reported by the managers in Studies Two and Three and the skills developed by providers in this investigation. In response to a question about the components of conflict handling skills, the managers sampled in Study Three (n=18) reported both generic (strategic) and specific (tactical) approaches to be significant, and this finding was consistent across both hypothetical and real life situations. In comparison, the OMD providers also identified strategic and tactical approaches to be important features of course design. In respect of knowledge development, eleven of the managers in Study Three (61%) reported knowledge as the basis for skills deployment and these data were consistent with the responses of all ten OMD providers. Overall, the findings of the four studies carried out so far support the idea of knowledge as a fundamental component of skilled performance. Moreover, these data further suggest that both declarative and procedural knowledge are used as a basis for skills application (Anderson, 1982; Starkes and Allard, 1993). The results also indicate that the interpersonal dimension is particularly important in the process of conflict regulation. For example, 77% (n=14) of the managers sampled for Study Three said that they experienced conflict on an individual basis, whilst 100% of the OMD providers in this investigation perceived the dimension of "interpersonal" to be significant. These results provide further support for the idea that interpersonal skills are a key component of effective conflict regulation, despite the comparative lack of information about this issue in the conflict handling literature (Deutsch, 1994).

The results for objective two reveal a clear level of equivalence between perceived provision for conflict handling in OMD and the skills reportedly required by managers at work. Once again, a clear message emerged about the use of declarative and procedural knowledge to underpin strategic and tactical approaches. However,

and also once again, there was much less clarity about the most appropriate methodologies to achieve the development of such skills, given the wide range of learning approaches that were identified. For example, one provider said: "the thought behind our courses came from the sports that we did. We find key elements in our sports that require two elements of knowledge to be communicated and we pull this together to reach the final goal". Similarly, another respondent explained their thinking as follows:

> I suppose confidence as an issue or as a theme is something that we do push quite strongly. As a message, it is about the fact that in order to try something out it's a risk, you might have the knowledge but to actually improve your skill base there is a risk attached to it so you need a certain degree of confidence. So I think that this field can be really powerful as to how far you open things up because it is really easy to open things up and surface the issues that are there but it is how you do it and when you do it.

Another provider said: "It's quite an emotional thing, where you have a situation where people are poles apart and simply cannot communicate and when you bring them together you usually can find some feedback and then people are really back together for the rest of the course – it's really incredible". These comments underline the somewhat vague and imprecise articulation of a rationale for the design and implementation of courses. Indeed, this issue runs in tandem with the lack of clarity in the literature about the training environments that should optimally be utilised to maximise the chances of effective skills application. Once again, utilisation of the principles underpinning the framework (rather than just the framework itself) was not evident from the provider responses. Thus, although further support was provided for the two design paths represented in the framework (which encompass the strategic – tactical continuum), evidence for a clear link between methodology and outcome did not emerge from the data and, indeed, from any study in this thesis. Arguably, the use of a qualitative approach within this study helped to highlight such an issue. Employment of a quantitative research methodology at this stage would have been likely to render information pertaining to the concepts represented in the framework, but may not have uncovered the apparent lack of rationale for why such methods were adopted.

Objective Three: To identify perceived approaches to learning transfer employed by OMD providers.

The results revealed a variety of approaches to learning transfer, including a number of course design variables used to facilitate skills application at work. In the dimension of Transfer Philosophy, the higher order theme of "approaches to learning transfer" identified the broad perspectives employed by providers and included a range of design features. These data serve to demonstrate the array of variables that were reportedly used to facilitate skills deployment and also point to the existence of different design philosophies which may have implications for the efficacy of OMD provision. In the dimension of Transfer Methodology, OMD providers identified a variety of methods and techniques used to facilitate the transfer process. These perspectives were consistent with the idea of OMD provision including a vast array of methods and approaches (Lucas, 1992; Bank, 1994) although there remains a lack of empirical evidence to support the efficacy of the initiatives that have been adopted (Hattie, *et. al.*, 1997). The higher order themes of "development support", "low fidelity designs" and "high fidelity designs" were reported by 70%, 50% and 70% of providers respectively. In addition, four providers (40%) said that they employed a combination of both high and low fidelity schemes. Thus the analysis provides support for the idea of variance in the extent to which programmes may be linked to work settings and corresponds closely to the idea of fidelity as being important in the transfer process (Anderson, 1982; Pennington, *et. al.*, 1995). It is interesting to note that two respondents reported little or no follow up to facilitate transfer, despite acknowledging the importance of the issue. One such provider commented:

> We only get transfer via managers' abilities to pick up the skills while they are on the course and to use these team skills back in the work environment. We don't do any visiting at the workplace. There's no follow up. We should, but we don't. We don't work on this area very much.

In a similar vein, the other provider said:

> You know we get people ring up and say "what on earth did you do to so and so" and you haven't done anything. You may have sat with them and talked them through something or you may have helped them over a hump or you

may know that the group has done something in its' own private meeting without the facilitator – and that is all you can say.

Such comments point to a fundamental lack of theoretical foundation upon which to optimise the effect of courses, and given the apparent lack of a coherent rationale to inform design decisions (identified under the discussion of Objectives One and Two), this must surely be of concern. Overall, the providers sampled in this investigation indicated the use of four basic designs. These were 1) low fidelity, where the emphasis was on matching the cognitive processing requirements of the outdoor and workplace tasks, 2) high fidelity, where the tasks in the outdoor setting were closely matched with those in the work application setting, 3) a combination of both and 4) designs in which neither type of approach was utilised. These data suggest that eighty percent of providers interviewed are using the variable of fidelity in their programmes. However, 20% are not. Thus, the evidence from these respondents is largely in keeping with what the literature (see Chapters Three and Four) and consumers (see Studies Two and Three) would advocate. However, a significant minority showed no awareness of its' importance. Furthermore, the findings revealed a high degree of variance in all of the provider responses concerning the linkage between stated programme objectives, the chosen methodology and the learning outcomes. Given this situation, it is unlikely to be clear to the clients that such processes / methodologies will result in these outcomes. In short, even if the provider has demonstrated an explicit awareness of the fidelity issue, they don't necessarily know what to do about it. In fact, this concern is clearly consistent with what has been an emphasis on outcomes rather than processes in much of the OMD research to date. Arguably, this is precisely the problem with much of the quantitative data that has been amassed in the domain of OMD. Thus one of the advantages of the qualitative approach utilised within this study has been the identification of a need for further analysis of provider rationalisations for the design of courses, including identification of the most efficacious approaches.

In common with the concepts represented in the framework, these data provide evidence of the linkage between strategic (declarative) and tactical (procedural) knowledge and skills alongside the presence of high and low fidelity designs which

were often used in combination. In summary, there was a good match between perceived need and perceived provision in OMD and the identified approaches fitted well with the concepts represented in the framework. Although these findings provided new information about the designs utilised and the nature of the knowledge and skills reportedly developed, there was less evidence of a coherent rationale for optimising the effect of programmes. The results indicate the presence of at least four basic designs to facilitate the transfer of learned skills to the workplace, although there was less consistency about the methodologies used to promote the acquisition of such skills. The fact that some providers did not identify any particular approach to learning transfer is a serious concern. Such an issue is likely to have implications for the efficacy of these courses, especially since the measure of OMD's value is likely to be linked strongly to the extent to which transfer can be shown. However, further investigation would be required to assess the implications of this result, given the importance of transfer as an aspect of high quality OMD provision (Lucas, 1992).

In summary, this investigation has revealed a number of variables to be significant in OMD provision and the findings indicate a high degree of equivalence with the data generated from Study Three regarding the components of conflict handling skills and the knowledge base underlying skills deployment. The results broadly support the use of declarative (generic) and procedural (specific) knowledge as a basis for the use of strategic (one way best) and tactical (contingency) approaches to conflict handling. These data also indicate the use of both low and high fidelity designs to facilitate learning transfer and overall, the findings confirm the concepts outlined in the framework (see Figure 5.1). However, there did not appear to be a coherent philosophy to drive the course design process and thus, for this sample at least, the approach seemed to be derived primarily from pragmatic rather than philosophical considerations. Hence further investigation to establish the extent of this problem seems warranted. Accordingly, the next stage of the fieldwork involved research with managers who had attended OMD courses in order to further investigate the development of conflict handling skills and to explore experiences of OMD provision from the perspective of participants. In addition, this phase was intended to provide something of a first step towards assessing the generalisability of the

framework to business contexts. Accordingly, the final study is reported in Chapter 10.

Chapter Ten

Study Five – Questionnaire Survey with Managers who have attended Outdoor Management Development Programmes

10.1 Introduction

To this point, Studies 1-4 had confirmed that the concepts represented in the framework were tenable insofar as they were a) features of existing skills provision in management training, b) characteristics of perceived knowledge and skills development, and c) design features of OMD provision for conflict handling. Insofar as the development of conflict handling skills is concerned, there was a good match between the requisite abilities stated by managers in their responses to Studies Two and Three and the knowledge and skills reportedly featured in OMD provision as a result of Study Four. However, the findings from Study Four also revealed a less consistent stance amongst OMD providers regarding the rationale for their approaches to the design and implementation of programmes. These data suggested that, although the concepts represented in the framework are indeed being applied as a component of OMD provision, the underlying reasons why are far from clear.

So far, the methods adopted have been qualitative. These have enabled in-depth information to be gathered. These investigations have been conducted using content analysis and semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to develop a tacit understanding of skills development and transfer *via* OMD. Although information has been gathered thus far about the skills utilised in business settings as well as provision for skill development in OMD, there has not been systematic research which addresses perceived provision from the managers' perspective. Thus, it was deemed appropriate to turn the focus of the investigation towards assessing the genericity of the framework to a wider managerial population. Accordingly, a questionnaire survey was utilised to obtain information from managers who had attended OMD programmes. It was hoped that the survey would provide an important foundation for broader assessment of the framework and that this phase

would also represent a move towards initiation of future research involving deductive testing of the concepts which had been postulated.

The choice of method was to some extent influenced by the need to gather more information from a wider population, but also by the advantages afforded by the use of the questionnaire survey as part of a mixed methods approach. Chapter 5 outlined how such an approach can help to combat weaknesses in the overall research strategy by minimising the weaknesses of one method through exploiting the strengths of another. Questionnaires are useful research tools because they allow each respondent to answer the same set of questions and this technique is an efficient way of collecting data from a large amount of respondents prior to quantitative analysis. The design of the questionnaire will also affect the reliability and validity of the data collected and, as Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2000) have noted, response rates, validity and reliability can be maximised by careful design of the questions, clear layout of the questionnaire form, lucid explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire, and pilot testing (p. 279). In addition, questionnaires are deemed to be appropriate for investigations where standardised questions are required which the researcher can be confident will be interpreted in the same way by all respondents (Robson, 1993).

10.2 Aims and Objectives

Two objectives were identified for the survey phase, and the structure of the questionnaire was designed to achieve these objectives (Bell, 1999; Oppenheim, 1992). In order to assess the applicability of the framework to OMD provision from the managers' perspective, two lines of enquiry were adopted. Firstly, investigations focused upon client's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD. Secondly, given the crucial role of learning transfer as part of effective skills development, data were also gathered about the client's perceptions of approaches to learning transfer employed by OMD providers. In summary, the objectives were as follows:

- To solicit client's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD.
- To identify perceived approaches to learning transfer employed by OMD providers.

10.3 Method

Participants

Participants in the survey were 39 managers (22 male, 17 female) working in a variety of business sectors including publishing, insurance, education and training. The participants were recruited through self-selection sampling (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000) and all had been participants on at least one OMD programme. A number of sources were used to recruit managers for this phase, including cross referrals from OMD providers who had participated in Study 4, and personal contacts established by the author as a result of working on OMD programmes as a tutor. Although this technique of sampling is widely used, it may be prone to bias and influences that are beyond the control of the researcher as the cases only appear in the sample because of their willingness to participate. However, these problems are less crucial where the sample is not intended to be representative of the whole population (Patton 1990). In this respect, the emphasis was on experiences of OMD rather then the nature of business participation. Accordingly, the self-selection method was considered acceptable.

The Survey Design

A number of themes were identified for the survey. The rationale for selection of these topics was determined first and foremost by the need to gather data about the concepts represented in the framework, including skills and knowledge acquired, methodologies used to promote skills learning and information about the transfer process. Additionally, background information was also gathered about programmes and individual circumstances, including motivations for attendance. This information enabled the researcher to build a series of bias checks into the procedure to ensure that respondents had attended a variety of different courses, and came from a range of different managerial spheres and levels. Questions were also included about length

of service and gender, to enable the representativeness of the sample to be evaluated. Overall, the total number of responses (n=39) included participants who had attended courses run by 27 different providers.

The survey themes were as follows:

- **Background information about the last OMD course attended**
- **Rationale for attending**
- **Identification of the skills acquired**
- **Knowledge**
- **Methodology**
- **Learning transfer**
- **Additional skills / knowledge / attributes**
- **Overall course design**

The first part of the questionnaire included factual questions to ascertain the period of time each respondent had been a manager and their level of responsibility. Participants were also asked to indicate when they last attended an outdoor development programme. In terms of the questionnaire structure, attitudinal information was elucidated by administration of a Likert Scale (Kervin, 1999) in which participants were asked to rate the relative importance of a range of course design variables (see the survey themes above). The remainder of the questions were open ended to allow for additional themes and ideas to emerge (Fink, 1995).

NB a copy of the questionnaire and the covering letter can be found in Appendix 9.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main phase of data collection. Its purpose was to refine the questionnaire so that respondents would have no problems in answering the questions and so that there would be no problems in recording the data. Following the procedures suggested by Mitchell (1996), three researchers with a background in quantitative research were recruited to comment on the representativeness and suitability of the questions. Following this phase,

questionnaires were completed by five managers who had attended OMD courses. These participants were asked to highlight issues relevant to a pilot survey, such as length of time taken to complete, clarity of instructions, areas of ambiguity in the questions, questions that were difficult to answer, any major topic omissions and the extent to which the layout was attractive (Bell, 1999). This procedure was for piloting purposes only and not included in the main survey findings. The data generated from this phase were used in the initial creation of the *SPSS for Windows* data file, which was also used for the main phase of analysis. The satisfactory administration of the pilot work enabled the next stage of data collection to commence.

Procedure

A process of self-selection sampling was used for the administration of the main survey (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000). This technique occurs when a case, usually an individual, is allowed to identify their desire to take part in the research. To facilitate this process, the researcher used a variety of business contacts to publicise the need for participants, using the criterion of attendance at an OMD course. Participants were primarily recruited through personal contact and cross referrals, as a number of respondents passed information about the research to other organisations. The author established initial contact with potential respondents, and mailed a questionnaire and covering letter assuring confidentiality to all those who expressed an interest (see Appendix 9). Overall, 150 questionnaires were sent out to prospective respondents over an eight-month period. This procedure led to the completion of 39 questionnaires (a completion rate of 26%), which were returned directly to the author in a pre-paid envelope.

Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken for all the questionnaires returned as a result of the main fieldwork phase (n=39). Descriptive statistics were performed for all the *Likert* scale responses. These included frequency distributions, measures of central tendency (arithmetic mean) and dispersion (standard deviation). All statistical procedures were performed using *SPSS for Windows* 9.0 (Chicago, USA). Open

questions were coded following the procedures outlined by Patton (1990) into numerical values, and emergent themes (James and Collins, 1997) and consensus validation processes were used throughout (Scanlan, Ravizza and Stein, 1989).

10.4 Results

The questionnaire was divided into 7 main sections; *(1) Background Information, (2) About Your Course, (3) Knowledge, (4) Methodology, (5) Learning Transfer, (6) Additional Skills and, (7) Course Design.*

The *Background Information* Section included a series of bias checks to ensure that respondents came from a number of different organisations and backgrounds. Thus there were eight questions relating to job title, length of service, gender, management level, degree of responsibility, direct reports, budget control, and last OMD course attended. These results are shown in Appendix 10. The demographic data show that over half of respondents (n=20) had been managers for 1-5 years and overall, a majority described themselves as operating at the middle and senior levels of management (n=32). Twenty respondents had less than ten direct reports, although there were six people with line management responsibility for over 50 employees. Most of the managers sampled in the investigation had attended an OMD programme within the previous two years (n=26).

In the second section *About Your Course*, the first two questions asked respondents to identify the main aims of the last OMD course attended and the reasons for participation. These data represent information from managers who had attended course run by a total number of 27 OMD providers and are shown in Tables 10.1.and 10.2. Managers usually identified more than one aim or reason to be significant and as a consequence, the total numbers appearing in the frequency column can exceed the number of managers in the sample (Scanlan, Ravizza and Stein, 1991).

Table 10.1 Main aims of the OMD course last attended; frequency scores and percentage of total responses (n = 39)

Main Aims	Frequency of incidence	Percentage of responses
Team building	24	34.3
Leadership Development	17	24.3
Improve Management skills	9	12.9
Personal Development	8	11.4
Change Management	4	5.7
Communication Skills	3	4.3
Learning about Cultural Differences	3	4.3
Creative Thinking	1	1.4
Problem Solving	1	1.4
TOTAL	70	100.0

Table 10.2 Main reasons for attendance; frequency scores and percentage of total responses (n = 39)

Main Reasons	Frequency of incidence	Percentage of responses
Improve Relevant Skills	16	31.4
Job requirement	12	23.5
Wanted to Learn	10	19.6
Improve Teamwork	6	11.8
Company Policy	5	9.8
Get to Know Others	2	3.9
TOTAL	51	100.0

As Table 10.1 shows, there were nine aims identified, of which "team building" was the most popular. Representing an interesting contrast, Table 10.2 lists the six stated reasons for attendance which were; 1) improve relevant skills, 2) job requirement, 3) wanted to learn, 4) improve teamwork, 5) company policy 6) get to know others.

In the second part of the section titled *About Your Course*, respondents were asked to identify the conflict handling skills that were developed. For each of the sixteen listed skills, a six point *Likert* scale coded 1= "not at all important" to 6= "very important" was used to identify the importance of the skills both personally, and as a perceived aspect of the course. The skills were intended to represent both generic and specific categories and were selected from the range of skills identified by OMD

providers in Study 4 (see Section 9.4). As an additional check, managers were asked to identify any additional conflict handling skills that were developed. Tables 10.3 and 10.4 display the frequency of representation for the mean and standard deviation of the course aims and personal aims categories respectively.

Table 10.3 Individual responses for the importance of conflict handling skills as an aspect of the last OMD course attended (n=39)

Importance of conflict handling skills as an aspect of the course

Skill Category	Mean	Standard Deviation
Process and implement decisions in groups	5.3	0.9
Managing change	4.3	1.7
Dealing with personality differences	4.6	1.6
Different styles of conflict handling	4.1	1.7
Listening skills	4.8	1.5
Dealing with unequal power relationships	3.0	2.0
Resolving Conflict as a third party	2.5	1.9
Negotiating skills	3.5	1.9
Assertiveness	3.4	2.0
Use of body language	2.7	1.8
Being open to other's views	4.9	1.1
Use problem solving approaches	5.0	1.7
Anticipating potential conflict	3.6	1.7
Modifying initial reactions	3.5	1.9
Use a step by step approach	3.0	2.1
Changing responses to conflict	3.5	1.7

Table 10.4 Individual responses for the importance of conflict handling skills to each respondent (n=39)

Importance of conflict handling skills to each respondent

Skill Category	Mean	Standard Deviation
Process and implement decisions in groups	5.0	1.1
Managing change	5.0	1.3
Dealing with personality differences	5.2	1.0
Different styles of conflict handling	4.7	1.5
Listening skills	5.3	0.9
Dealing with unequal power relationships	3.9	1.7
Resolving Conflict as a third party	3.5	1.9
Negotiating skills	4.3	1.8
Assertiveness	4.3	1.6
Use of body language	3.6	1.8
Being open to other's views	5.2	0.1
Use problem solving approaches	5.3	1.0
Anticipating potential conflict	4.3	1.6
Modifying initial reactions	4.1	1.8
Use a step by step approach	3.7	2.1
Changing responses to conflict	4.2	1.5

Table 10.5 shows the correlation scores between the rated importance of each skill as an aspect of the course and to each respondent personally.

Table 10.5 Correlation scores for the importance of conflict handling skills - as an aspect of the course and for each respondent personally (n=39)

Skill Category	Correlation Score
Process and implement decisions in groups	0.760**
Managing change	0.424**
Dealing with personality differences	0.560**
Different styles of conflict handling	0.659**
Listening skills	0.515**
Dealing with unequal power relationships	0.511**
Resolving Conflict as a third party	0.539**
Negotiating skills	0.633**
Assertiveness	1.000**
Use of body language	0.644**
Being open to other's views	0.625**
Use problem solving approaches	0.024
Anticipating potential conflict	0.480**
Modifying initial reactions	0.847**
Use a step by step approach	0.740**
Changing responses to conflict	0.580**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

Table 10.6 below shows the additional conflict handling skills that were identified by respondents, over and above those skills which were already listed in the second part of Section Two.

Table 10.6 Additional conflict handling skills (n = 39)

Skill	**Frequency (no. of respondents)**
Coping with different management styles	1
Understanding cause of problems	2
Ownership of problems by team members	1
Increased awareness	5
Looking from new angles	1
Not to be negative	1
Confronting behaviours	1
Honesty	1
Feedback	1
TOTAL	14

In Section Three concerning *Knowledge*, managers were asked to list up to three ways in which the last OMD course attended extended their knowledge of the conflict handling process. A six point *Likert* scale coded 1= "not at all important" to 6= "very important" was used to identify the incidence and importance of the knowledge to each respondent. Table 10.7 shows the mean and standard deviation for each of the four categories reported. These were; 1) generic knowledge, 2) specific knowledge, 3) self-knowledge and 4) knowledge of others.

Table 10.7 Incidence and importance of knowledge to each respondent (n=39)

Knowledge	**Frequency of incidence**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Generic	35	5.2	1.1
Specific	16	5.3	0.6
Self Knowledge	9	5.7	0.5
Knowledge of Others	31	5.0	1.1
TOTAL	91	5.2	1.0

Section 4 of the questionnaire concerned the methods used to develop conflict handling skills during the last OMD programme attended. Managers were asked to list up to four methods used by the course team, and to rate each of their answers

using a six point *Likert* scale coded 1= "not at all important" to 6="very important". For each of the methods listed, managers were asked to identify their importance, both as an aspect of the course, and to them personally. Table 10.8 displays the mean, frequency and standard deviation figures for these responses.

Section Five, *Learning Transfer* asked managers to list up to three ways in which the last OMD course attended helped the transfer of learning from the outdoor context into the workplace. Overall, four categories were identified: 1) self-knowledge, 2) teamwork, 3) personal skills and 4) psychometric tests. A six point *Likert* scale coded 1= "not at all effective" to 6= "very effective" was used to identify the effectiveness of each approach. Table 10.9 displays the mean, frequency and standard deviation for these results.

Table 10.8 Methods used by the course team to promote the learning of conflict handling skills in the last OMD course attended; importance as an aspect of the course and to respondents personally (n=39)

Methods Used	**Frequency of Incidence / Mean / Std. Deviation**	**Importance as an Aspect of the Course**	**Importance Personally**
Personal Skills	Incidence of responses	38	38
	Mean	5.2	5.3
	Std. Deviation	0.8	0.8
Information Giving	Incidence of Responses	17	17
	Mean	5.0	5.0
	Std. Deviation	1.0	1.0
Practical Activities	Incidence of Responses	43	43
	Mean	5.1	4.8
	Std. Deviation	1.0	1.0
Total	Incidence of Responses	98	98
	Mean	5.1	5.0
	Std. Deviation	0.9	0.9

Table 10.9 Effectiveness of approaches to learning transfer (n=39)

Approaches to Learning Transfer	**Frequency of Incidence**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Self Knowledge	18	5.1	0.8
Teamwork	20	5.0	1.1
Personal Skills	42	5.0	1.2
Psychometric Tests	1	3.0	0
TOTAL	81	4.9	1.1

Section Six of the questionnaire concerned additional skills, knowledge and attributes over and above those already identified. Managers were asked to list up to three, and to rate these using a six point *Likert* scale coded 1= "not at all important" to 6= "very important". Table 10.10 shows the mean, frequency and standard deviation for these results.

Table 10.10 Additional Skills / Knowledge / Attributes (n=39)

Additional Skills	**Frequency of Incidence**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Generic	29	5.4	0.6
Specific	14	5.1	1.1
Self Knowledge	16	5.2	1.3
TOTAL	59	5.3	1.0

For the final section, respondents rated the emphasis on aspects of course design for the last OMD programme attended. Four design elements were identified and coded using a six point *Likert* scale coded 1= "not at all emphasised" to 6= "high degree of emphasis" Table 10.11 shows the mean, frequency and standard deviation for these results.

Table 10.11 Course design elements; degree of emphasis (n=39)

Degree of Emphasis	Frequency (no. of respondents)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Conflict Handling Skills	38	4.2	1.3
Knowledge	38	3.7	1.1
Learning Transfer	38	4.2	1.4
Personal Development	38	4.8	1.3

10.5 Discussion

The managers sampled in this investigation identified many features of OMD provision to be important for the development of conflict handling skills. However, there were some limitations to the use of the survey method which should be acknowledged. Firstly, the questionnaire was used to measure managers' *perceptions* of their experiences, and there were no opportunities to probe or clarify these reactions. Another problem with questionnaires is that they cannot probe deeply into respondent's feelings and, once they have been distributed, it is not possible to amend the items (Thomas and Nelson, 1990). However, it was hoped that the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies within the overall research strategy enabled the strengths of both to be utilised (Smith, 1975).

Objective One: To solicit client's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD.

A wide range of aims and personal motivations were reported. Tables 10.1 and 10.2 show that overall, the aims of teambuilding, leadership development and skill acquisition were popular and these findings were consistent with the diversity of OMD provision and the range of promised outcomes that may accrue (Bank, 1994; Chapman and Lumsden, 1983; Schofield, 1997). This perspective is also congruent with the notion that the outdoors provides an appropriate vehicle for group development activities (Bronson, 1992). However, there is a rather apparent mismatch between what managers felt was offered (e.g. "team building") and their expressed priorities for attendance (e.g. "improve relevant skills"). A particularly

significant issue that emerged concerned the importance of skills development in both the aims and personal motivations categories. Thus, skills provision was emphasised both as a key feature of OMD, and as being important to managers' personally. Clearly, this finding is consistent with messages in the literature which emphasise the importance of skilled performance in conflict handling (Deutsch, 1994) but may be at odds with more holistic or vague claims for character / confidence building espoused by some providers (see Chapter Nine – discussion).

In accordance with the findings of De Dreu (1997) and Baron (1997), it was apparent that the abilities employed by managers to deal with conflict were not limited to single approaches nor to dealing with a particular conflict issue. Rather, a variety of skills were reportedly developed *via* the OMD course last attended and the correlation scores for the importance of each of these categories as an aspect of the course and personally shows significance for all skills except problem solving (0.024). The lack of correlation in the problem solving category is somewhat surprising, given the messages in the conflict handling literature about its use as a strategy (Van di Vliert, *et al.*, 1999). Overall however, there was a high degree of consistency between the skills that were reportedly developed and the importance of these skills to managers personally. The perception was that both generic (strategic) and specific (tactical) skills were acquired, and these findings further emphasise the perceived importance of skilled performance in conflict handling alongside the broad skills categories suggested by conflict theorists (Deutsch, 1994; Folberg and Taylor, 1984). Thus, insofar as the development of conflict handling skills is concerned, these data provide support for the notion that OMD may be an effective training medium for skills learning. However, provider responses concerning the rationale for the use of particular approaches revealed a less coherent stance. Indeed, although the OMD providers sampled in Study 4 (n=10) identified both strategic (n=9) and tactical (n=8) skills to be a feature of provision for conflict handling, evidence for a theoretically derived set of principles to determine what mode of design should be adopted was never apparent. Analysis of the survey data also reveals a high degree of parity with the concepts represented in the framework (Figure 5,1) and thus a good

match between methods and outcomes. However, the underlying reasons behind the use of such approaches were less clear.

In terms of the additional conflict handling skills that were developed, "increased awareness" was the most popular (see Table 10.6). These findings provide tentative support for the idea that OMD may increase self-confidence as a result of facing outdoor challenges which is in accord with the proposal that outdoor experiences and "impossible for me" tasks may enhance self efficacy (Hattie, 1997). Indeed, as Chapter 2 revealed, in some quarters there has been the assumption that learning *via* OMD tends to "just happen" and this is consistent with the lack of focus in the literature upon the philosophy and process aspects (rather than the outcomes) of OMD (Lucas, 1992).

In the *Knowledge* section, managers identified ways in which the last OMD course attended extended their knowledge of the conflict handling process. The categories of generic and specific knowledge were cited, including a combination of both. These data provide further evidence for the declarative – procedural continuum as a feature of skills deployment. The findings were also consistent with messages in the literature emphasising the essential role of knowledge in effective skills application (Allard, 1993; Mumford, 1997) and the importance of knowledge for the development of conflict handling skills (Rahim, 1992). Additionally, the variables of "self knowledge" and "knowledge of others" suggest OMD provision for both individual and group development skills (Arkin, 1990), albeit that self-knowledge received a surprisingly infrequent endorsement.

In terms of the framework (See Figure 5.1), these data provide further support for the decalarative-strategic and procedural-tactical linkage as a feature of OMD provision. The majority of managers sampled in this investigation emphasised provision for skills development to be most important – both as an aspect of the last course attended and to them personally. Notably, this issue was also emphasised strongly by the OMD providers sampled in Study Four and there was also consistency between the knowledge categories for these sets of data - namely "generic", "specific" and a

"combination of both". Overall, these findings indicate that the concepts represented in the framework are tenable and legitimate features of knowledge and skills development in the domain of OMD. However, the data from these studies do not provide compelling evidence for the existence of a clearly articulated set of theoretical principles to guide decisions about the design or suitability of courses. Furthermore, as skills development was rated as such an important aspect of OMD provision (see Table 10.2), it was surprising that a similar focus was not reflected in the aims of the programmes offered (see Table 10.1). Thus, from these responses as least, there was inconsistency between clients expressed reasons for attendance and the stated course objectives.

Objective Two: To investigate the relationship between OMD methodology and skills transfer

The results for the *Methodology* section showed that "practical activities" were rated as a primary vehicle for skills development (see Table 10.8). However, the importance of this variable was more highly rated as an aspect of the course than personally and this result could indicate that some courses place more emphasis on the outdoor elements than the requisite learning (Dainty and Lucas, 1992). Indeed, this type of design has been associated with poor OMD provision as too much emphasis is placed upon "concrete experience" rather than the reflective and behavioural components of the learning cycle which are more crucial to the desired skills development (See Figure 2.1). Nonetheless, these data are clearly consistent with the use of experiential learning models to inform course design (Mumford, 1987). The second most frequently referred to methodology was "personal skills" (n=38) which were rated slightly more favourably personally than as an aspect of the course, although the overall rating for both categories was high. Once again, these data underline the importance of the skills element in OMD and the need for abilities that enable skilled performance in conflict handling (Deutsch, 1994). The results are also highly consistent with the emphasis on interpersonal skills reported by all of the providers sampled for Study 4 (n=10). The final category in the methodology section was "information giving" (n=17), which received the same importance rating as an aspect of the course and personally. This result suggests the use of theory to underpin

learning and is also in accordance with the provider study in which 80% of respondents cited the development of theoretical knowledge as an aspect of provision.

In the *Learning Transfer* section, managers identified four variables to be significant in facilitating learning transfer (see Table 10.9). Once again, these data offer further support for the importance of skills learning in OMD provision, given the perceived popularity of "personal skills" as a vehicle for learning transfer. The variable of "teamwork" was also cited by 20 respondents. Overall, these data suggest that both individual and group based mechanisms may be useful in assisting learning transfer. In accordance with the observations of Galpin (1989), one of the outcomes of OMD may be enhanced self-confidence and this factor appeared to feature as evidenced by the strength of responses in the self-knowledge category (mean score=5.1). However, the low incidence (18 from 81) is surprising and in contrast to this view. Another important point concerns the support mechanisms to reinforce learning which were mentioned by 70% of providers in the previous study (n=7) and reinforced by the survey results which indicated the efficacy of self-knowledge as a transfer approach. Somewhat surprisingly, the extent of linkage to work contexts was not immediately apparent (although it could be hypothesised that a variety of approaches were employed, especially given the emphasis on generic and specific skills reported as a design feature). Thus the survey findings were not conclusive as to whether high or low fidelity designs were utilised as a basis for transfer. Certainly the low incidence of self-knowledge could be a factor in this (*c.f.* Table 10.9)

The managers sampled in this investigation specified three categories of additional skills (see Table 10.10). These findings indicated that the skills acquired may be contingent upon the situation or applied generically across a range of settings. Additionally, self-knowledge was rated as being significant and this perspective offers further support for the idea that OMD may develop self-confidence and insight skills (Ewert, 1983; Annandale, 1986). These data also suggest that a combination of generic and specific skills may be a useful part of a managers' portfolio and compared with the findings of Study 4, there was a considerable degree of overlap

with the strategic and tactical approaches reported as features of OMD provision. The variable of personal development was accorded the highest degree of emphasis as a course design element (see Table 10.11). This finding was consistent with the use of the outdoors as a vehicle for the improvement of a wide range of personal skills and abilities, including the enhancement of self-confidence (Donnan, 1985). Overall, these data are broadly in accordance with the results from the provider study, in which 80% of respondents cited course design variables to be important in skills development. Within the category of course design variables, the higher order theme of "skills based" was the most popular and this message emerged from both the provider and manager data. Thus at one level, the evidence suggests a high degree of consistency between the design paths utilised by OMD providers and the knowledge and skills required by managers. However, in examining the development of conflict handling skills, there is considerably less clarity concerning the underlying philosophy underpinning the application of methodologies to promote skills development. Indeed, when the relationship between methodology and skills transfer is analysed, a similar pattern emerged. For example, although high and low fidelity designs were reportedly utilised by providers to promote transfer (notwithstanding the two respondents who could not identify any particular approach), the fundamental reasons why such methodologies were employed were far from obvious. Similarly, the managers sampled in this investigation identified a number of variables to be significant in respect of learning transfer but once again, an expressed and coherent link between programme aims, methodology and outcomes was not evident from these data.

In terms of assessing the applicability of the framework to OMD provision, these findings support the linkage of declarative and procedural knowledge to strategic and tactical skills. However, the data offered less uniformity about the use of high and low fidelity designs to support the process of learning transfer, although the provider data from Study 4 indicated the variable of "fidelity" to be significant, if rarely fully exploited. However, given the evidence from both studies about the existence of the strategic – tactical continuum, it is nonetheless feasible that variance in the degree of linkage to work settings was afforded by the use of one design over another. Indeed,

further examination of this issue and its role in the transfer process would appear to offer a useful line of enquiry for further research. Thus the findings of this investigation offer clear information about the nature of the skills utilised and the knowledge base underlying skills deployment. However, there was greater variance in the mechanisms for skills transference in terms of their linkage to business settings and also a lack of clarity concerning the rationale for the use of one approach over another, despite the variety of transfer methodologies identified.

Ultimately, the findings from Studies 1-5 have allowed for the concepts represented in the framework to be analysed for their applicability to OMD provision. Accordingly, the next chapter summarises these findings and presents the overall conclusions, including future directions for research.

Chapter Eleven

Summary of Findings, General Discussion and Future Directions for Research

11.1 Introduction

The combination of existing theory and research has enabled the framework to be developed so that the concepts within it can be evaluated for their applicability to OMD provision. This thesis has shown the framework to be both theoretically sound and practically tenable, as evidenced from the literature and from the empirical data that have been gathered thus far. Accordingly, this chapter summarises the results from each of the fieldwork phases, highlights the implications arising from these findings and outlines future directions for research

11.2 Summary of Findings

Prior to this study, existing research has offered comparatively little evidence to support the efficacy of OMD programmes. Contemporary works show a strong emphasis on identifying the outcomes of courses, rather the mechanisms whereby these outcomes may accrue. To date, most of the OMD literature displays a tendency to rely on anecdotal or correlational evidence rather than empirical support and there is a lack of consideration given to the processes of skills learning and transfer. In a similar fashion, the literature on conflict handling has been characterised by messages which underline the importance of conflict regulation but offer little guidance about the skills which are required. Thus, in parallel with the literature on OMD, there was a fundamental lack of information about the mechanisms for skills development and transfer, despite the acknowledgement of conflict handling as a key managerial function. Hence, the domain of conflict management offered the researcher an appropriate and legitimate focus for examining the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer *via* OMD. Thereafter, the literature on cognitive skill acquisition was used to link the role of knowledge in skill acquisition to the process of learning transfer in order to propose a way in which different approaches to the design of OMD programmes may affect learning outcomes. As a result, a new

framework was constructed to represent the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer via OMD.

The fieldwork phase (Studies 1-5) allowed for the framework to be developed via a focus upon emergent themes and issues whilst also facilitating a check upon its' applicability to OMD provision in respect of the nature, process and development of conflict handling skills. The findings from **Study One** (content analysis of management development brochures) revealed four broad approaches to skills development. Thus managers were offered a variety of training opportunities based around the development of declarative and procedural knowledge (including combinations of both), as well as some offerings where no clear orientation was evident. These data provided some support for the use of generic and specific approaches in skills development although there was much greater variance in the methodologies explicitly linked to these outcomes. There was also less clarity about the underlying rationale for particular approaches and how this may influence the skills that were deployed. Nonetheless, these data allowed for an assessment of the approaches to skills development utilised by management development providers and confirmed that the declarative – procedural continuum is represented in the design of programmes.

Following this phase, **Study Two** (semi – structured interviews with managers) utilised the skills of conflict handling as a focus for further investigation into the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer. To begin with, it was necessary to identify the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work, including the extent to which they were generic or specific in their application. The findings revealed a wide range of skills to be significant, including a number of additional variables which impacted upon the conflict handling process. Overall, the data revealed a taxonomy involving skills applied strategically, tactically, and in combination, including a proportion of respondents who did not report using any conflict handling skills. Clearly, echoes were to be found between these data and the declarative – procedural approaches identified as a result of Study One. Thus the results from Studies One and Two were consistent with the strategic – tactical

continuum represented in the framework and provided an important platform for further analysis of skills deployment.

In order to probe more deeply into the determinents of skills application, **Study Three** (semi - structured interviews with managers) was designed to identify the knowledge base underlying skills deployment, clarify the levels at which conflict occurred and specify the perceived sources of skill acquisition. The results from this phase provided further support for the linkage between declarative and procedural knowledge and the use of strategic and tactical skills for conflict regulation. In addition, the findings offered empirical confirmation of the levels at which conflict is manifest in business, namely inter-organisational, inter and intra group, and individual. In terms of perceived sources of the skills utilised, respondents identified organisational factors and concern for colleagues to be significant. An important contribution also concerned the use of previous experience to inform the approach and this finding strengthened the case for the essential role of knowledge in skills development and underlined the need for focused training provision to develop such abilities.

Overall, studies 1-3 provided useful information about the nature of work conflict and the process of conflict regulation. In terms of the framework, these data were consistent with the tactical - strategic continuum and the proposed linkage to declarative and procedural knowledge. However, it was then deemed necessary to embark upon a detailed analysis of OMD provision for the development of conflict handling skills, in order to further scrutinise the concepts represented in the framework. Accordingly, the purposes of **Study 4** (semi - structured interviews with outdoor management development providers) included soliciting provider's perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD, discovering the extent of similarity between this provision and the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work and identifying perceived approaches to learning transfer. In sum, these results indicated a variety of methodologies and approaches to be key features of OMD provision. Most of the programme designs revealed a skills based focus and, overall, the data suggested the development of two types of knowledge explicitly

linked to two types of skills, sometimes deployed in combination. Thus there was a clear message about the use of declarative and procedural knowledge to inform the application of strategic and tactical approaches although these categories were not usefully regarded as mutually exclusive, or indeed truly dichotomous. Clearly, the declarative / strategic and procedural / tactical paths could usefully be nested where the course contained elements of both or, alternatively, appear to be quite distinct when the design is characterised predominantly by features of one or the other. Thus, the data suggest that courses may be declaratively orientated, proecdurally orientated or characterised by features of both, depending upon the type of design utilised. Additionally, there was also a strong degree of equivalence between perceived provision for conflict handling and the skills reportedly used by managers to deal with work conflict (as evidenced by the results from Studies Two and Three. In respect of the learning transfer approaches utilised, OMD providers identified the use of one of four basic designs to facilitate the transfer of learned skills to the workplace; 1) low fidelity, where similarity was maintained between the cognitive processing requirements of the tasks in the outdoor setting and those in the business environment, 2) high fidelity, where elements of the tasks were closely matched with those in the business application setting, 3) a combination of both and, 4) designs where neither approach was a feature. Clearly, the revelation that two providers could not identify any particular approach to learning transfer is of some concern and must surely call into question the nature of such provision, especially given the importance of effective transfer as a component of high quality programmes. In terms of the framework, the results from Study 4 were consistent with the concepts represented in respect of the proposed "declarative – strategic - low fidelity" and "procedural – tactical - high fidelity" continuum (see Figure 5.1). Thus the data provided evidence of the linkage between the concepts represented in the framework and the course designs utilised. Once again, the results reveal that these paths may be linked where the course contains elements of both and thus they are not usefully regarded as mutually exclusive. Notably however, a common theme running through these data concerned an apparent lack of rationale for the variety of approaches adopted. Thus in respect of the development of conflict handling skills, a degree of consistency was offered with the framework in terms of the methodologies utilised

but a common understanding about the determining *factors* which may be used to inform design decisions was not evident from these results.

The provider data laid the foundation for the final phase of the research. Thus, **Study Five** (questionnaire survey with managers who had attended OMD courses) represented something of a "first step" towards assessing the generalisability of the framework to a wider managerial population. Hence, information was sought from managers who had attended OMD programmes in order to ascertain the extent to which the concepts within the framework were tenable, and indeed meaningful, to participants who had first-hand experience of OMD. The objectives of this study were twofold; firstly, to solicit clients perceptions of provision for conflict handling in OMD and secondly, to investigate the relationship between OMD methodology and skills transfer. Notably, the results provided additional evidence about the use of declarative and procedural knowledge to underpin strategic and tactical skills deployment. There was also evidence that OMD was perceived to be an appropriate medium for the development of such skills and these findings were in accord with the provider data which highlighted provision for a wide range of skills and abilities. Respondents' perceptions of the transfer process indicated individual and group based mechanisms to be important, including the use of support systems to reinforce learning. However, there was less clarity about the role of "fidelity", and thus it was not clear from the data whether courses were perceived to be distinguishable by the degree of emphasis accorded to work during the course of skills development. However, in both studies, the data offered a high level of consistency between perceived provision and perceived need for skills development in OMD and, in terms of assessing the generalisability of the framework, the data from Study Five reinforced the declarative - strategic and procedural – tactical continuum. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasising that these design paths are not intended to be reciprocally exclusive. Rather, the framework is usefully regarded as representative of a range of design variables which may, under some circumstances remain distinct, whilst in others, could be suitably combined - depending upon the intended aims of the programme. Once again, provision for skills development was underlined most strongly both as a perceived design feature and as being important to respondents

personally. In sum, the findings from Study Five support the framework in terms of the linkage between knowledge and skills development, although a coherent rationale for such approaches was not immediately apparent.

Overall, the findings from Studies 1-5 offered new insights into the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer via OMD. By establishing the linkage between declarative and procedural knowledge and the strategic / tactical methods of conflict resolution (see Figure 5.1), these data have enabled a new focus upon the processes of learning, rather than the outcomes that may accrue. New evidence was also gathered about the variable of "fidelity" as a perceived component of OMD provision, including the use of high and low fidelity designs to promote the transfer of learned skills. Overall, the framework has been shown to be justifiable insofar as the concepts represented within it are reportedly utilised (by OMD providers) and recognised (by managers) as aspects of skills development. However once again, the data from Studies Four and Five suggest a common lack of understanding on behalf of both providers and clients as to the pedagogical or philosophical *principles* underlying the application of particular methodologies to maximise efficacy.

A number of additional points merit further discussion. Firstly, the provider data indicated that choices about learning transfer were likely to be more pragmatic than philosophical, and this is consistent with the apparent lack of common rationale to inform the process of course design. In addition, the interview data revealed that many companies are reluctant to fund the post course follow-up and reinforcement that is recommended and that the reasons for this may be linked to motivations for utilising training provision in the first place. Hence it was suggested that some organisations pay "lip service" to training, regarding it as more of a public relations exercise than a developmental opportunity. This view was evidenced from the higher order theme of "transfer philosophy" reported in the results for Study 4 (see Figure 9.3). Within this category, the potential of OMD to promote negative transfer was also highlighted. Indeed, this is an important issue and one which has been neglected in much of the literature to date. Crucially, these findings demonstrate the

importance of clarifying the circumstances under which transfer may be achieved and the need for a clear theoretical paradigm to support the design of programmes.

Secondly, there was a high degree of equivalence between perceived provision for skills development in OMD and the skills reportedly used by managers to deal with conflict at work. Thus there was a high degree of correlation between the skills developed and the importance of these skills to managers personally, although further work would be required to clarify the circumstances under which such skills may be optimally developed and transferred into business contexts, given the wide range of methodologies that were identified.

Thirdly, the category of "practical activities" in the questionnaire survey attracted a high number of manager responses (n=43) as a method used to promote skills development. Arguably, the outdoor experiences which form an integral part of OMD provision are an important part of the process but this finding raises questions about the degree of emphasis accorded to the outdoor activities vs. the process of skills reinforcement. Indeed, a lack of attention to the latter has been highlighted in the literature as a feature of poor OMD provision (Sakofs, 1991; Schofield, 1997; Lucas, 1992).

The issue of tutor competence was also identified by providers as being significant in unlocking the possibilities for transfer (see Figure 9.3). The ability of the tutor to manage the learning process is arguably a crucial (but often neglected) issue, despite the attention accorded to the role of tutor as "facilitator" by proponents of experiential approaches (Mumford, 1987; Kolb, Rubin and Mcintyre, 1984). It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that attention be given to this issue during the design stage of programmes. In addition, and perhaps not surprisingly, the variable of "course design" was cited by providers as being a factor in the range of outcomes that may be achieved. In particular, it was suggested that longer courses offered more development potential than those of shorter duration (see Figure 9.3), although the reasons for this were not clearly manifest. In fact, this was also seen as something of a resource problem whereby some clients were unable (or unwilling) to fund longer

programmes. Three providers mentioned the demise of the one-week course in favour of those of two or three days duration which was perceived as rapidly becoming the norm.

The final point concerns the issue of self-knowledge / awareness, which emerged as an important variable. As the previous discussions have shown, the notion of OMD as a vehicle for enhancing self-confidence is not new (Bank, 1994). However, consideration of this issue may provide further insight into the development of skills learning and transfer. Such investigations are likely to provide new information about the extent to which OMD is, in fact, facilitating the learning of new skills or conversely, unlocking the potential to apply them.

11.3 Applied Implications

A number of theoretical and practical implications arise from these findings. Overall, the thesis has offered a basis for reassessing the mechanisms of skills learning and transfer via a focus upon the processes rather than the outcomes of OMD. Crucially, the framework expands upon the use of cognitive skill acquisition theory by linking the role of knowledge in skill acquisition to the issue of learning transfer within the context of OMD. Consequently, the interrelationships between the concepts represented in the framework suggest that a multi-disciplinary approach is more appropriate than the use of single discipline to examine skills development in this setting. It also seems reasonable to suggest that these concepts allow for this analysis to be generalisable to other domains of management development provision, and this line of enquiry may constitute an important direction for future work. In addition, the problem of learning transfer has been highlighted. As the previous chapters have shown, to date the efficacy of OMD has been based upon the implicit assumption that transfer tends to "just happen" (Lucas, 1992). The research has allowed for this assumption to be examined and the processes of transfer to be investigated. The methodology has also facilitated a reappraisal of the degree to which outdoor experiences may be linked to work settings to promote a range of learning outcomes.

There are also a number of practical implications arising from the research. To begin with, organisations considering the use of OMD may wish to question the training provider about the philosophy underlying skills learning and transfer. The research findings indicate that a number of designs are utilised, namely 1) declarative, 2) procedural, 3) a combination of both, and 4) neither declarative nor procedural. Crucially however, the data do not appear to offer a clear philosophical or theoretical rationale for the adoption of each of these four designs nor offer users any structured means by which to evaluate the potential efficacy of course content and method. Indeed, a mixed design incorporating a number of elements may be the best option for organisations wishing to facilitate the "best of both worlds" by combining long and short term aspects of skills development. Thus, for example, whilst it could be hypothesised that a combination of declarative and procedural methodologies *may* well offer the greatest degree of flexibility for skills development, it remains beyond the scope of any provider to explain how this may be most effectively accomplished.

In terms of conflict handling, it is also recommended that prospective clients ascertain the skills that may be developed via OMD (i.e. strategic or tactical), especially given the consequences of inappropriate levels of work conflict for performance and productivity. Arguably, the skills issue is likely to become even more important in the future as organisations are rationalised in the global business environment. The choice of OMD provider may also be mediated by the need to ascertain how their particular methodology fits with the organisation's current and future needs, the balance between these, and its' approach to training and development. Thus, for example, there are several issues to consider which tend to favour the declarative model for long-term benefit and the procedural model for the fulfilment of short-term objectives. Indeed, it seems likely that course designs emphasising broad-based approaches to conflict resolution may offer greater development potential in the longer term because of the emphasis on skills application across different settings. Thus, procedural designs may be more appropriate for training intact units from one company whereas declarative approaches may be more suited to open programmes involving delegates from a variety of organisations. Notably, courses incorporating a mixture of elements may

offer distinct advantages in terms of minimising the short-term / long-term trade off and this may be especially pertinent, given the fluid nature of business organisations in the current global environment. Once again however, there was no evidence that providers, or indeed clients, could comment on the efficacy of various design paths to meet these needs.

It is also recommended that client organisations give due consideration to the circumstances under which transfer may be optimised. Pertinent issues include the degree of post-course follow-up that is provided to reinforce skills transfer, the extent to which pre-course audits are utilised, the competence of the course team to deliver focused and relevant learning and the congruence between the outdoor tasks and those of the work setting. Consideration should also be given to how best to facilitate both the long and short-term aspects of skills development, as well as the ways in which organisations can provide support for the greater levels of self-awareness that may accrue for participants and providers alike. It is also recommended that companies consider in-house provision for quality skills practice. The use of a sound structural framework both informs and facilitates these decisions.

From the OMD provider's perspective, the research signals a move away from assessing outcomes towards careful analysis of the rationale underpinning the use of particular methodologies. To use a sporting analogy, the coach has a range of process methodologies at her disposal to develop and improve performance. However, without the underpinning declarative knowledge base and underlying rationale as to why such approaches should be utilised, the chances to maximise performance *by design* are severely limited. In a similar fashion, the thesis has revealed a wide range of OMD methodologies, many of which are consistent with the framework. However a common strand running through the thesis studies has been a lack of evidence for the rationale underlying these designs. Hence, the procedures are in place, but there is a dearth of declarative knowledge to inform the various approaches that have been utilised. Without this crucial element, the potential for transfer of what learning may occur is left purely to chance. Thus, it appears that the approach has been "it works because we've always done it". Consideration should therefore be given to measures

of efficacy and consequently, the constituents of good and bad practice in the outdoors. This work is necessary, if not essential, because of the widespread lack of empirical evidence to support the design of courses, together with the often lacsidaisical "of course it works" approach apparent from the providers.

11.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Arguably, the biggest weakness in this thesis is that the framework was not specifically tested. Indeed, this was originally the aim but the literature search revealed a number of variables which required further analysis before the testing procedure could commence. For example, it was necessary to clarify the skills used by managers to deal with conflict at work before such skills could be usefully categorised. Thus, based on the findings of this investigation, several lines of future research seem warranted. Firstly, a large scale quantitative study to assess the extent to which declarative vs. procedural designs are used would offer a useful foundation for further work to assess the efficacy of OMD provision. Linked to this, it would also be of interest if further work were to investigate the extent to which declarative models are more appropriate for "open" programmes and procedural designs are more suitable for "closed" provision. In addition, research to establish the nature and role of tacit knowledge in the deployment of conflict handling skills would be of benefit. However, given the "unpacked data" implications apparent in Chapter Nine, a mixed methodology examining both approach AND rationale would be essential.

Because the process of skills learning and transfer is a long-term process, it is recommended that future investigators conduct longitudinal studies using behavioural measures to ascertain skills development via OMD. Analysis of the mediating features of course design would permit the question of behavioural change to be evaluated from a process rather than an outcome based perspective and enable the veracity of recommendations from the suggested framework to be evaluated. Conducting this type of study would also help to overcome the limitations of one-time retrospective interviews and questionnaires (e.g. were the findings accurately recalled, or does one's perceived success of the course determine the recollection of

events?). Certainly longer-term follow up is essential, based on both aims and conduct of OMD interventions.

The qualitative analysis of the data suggests that high and low fidelity designs may be a design feature of OMD provision. However, further work to assess the relationship between these designs and the learning outcomes of courses may provide a useful line of investigation. This work would also allow for clarification of the circumstances under which negative transfer may occur.

An additional direction for future research involves the need to investigate the relationship between managerial role and conflict level. In particular, it would be useful to establish the requisite skills for dealing with conflict at different organisational levels i.e. inter-organisational, inter-group, intra-group and individual.

The findings revealed a number of variables that are likely to influence the process of skills learning and transfer via OMD. Further examination of these variables may enable future investigators to control for these mediating factors and facilitate the development of more sensitive measures of efficacy. In addition, further examination of the role of self-awareness in the process of skills development seems warranted, and a possible line of enquiry involves analysis to determine the exact role and "modus operandi" of enhanced self-confidence, a factor commonly seen as the major perceived outcome of OMD.

Finally, there is a need to assess the generalisability of the model to other areas of management development provision and/or educational contexts. For example, research examining whether similar findings would be evident in other populations is needed as arguably, the issue of skills development and transfer is as pertinent in these contexts as it is in the domain of OMD.

APPENDIX 1

Interview Schedule - Study 2

Instructions for managers:

Conflict Definition (clarification / discussion):
Please comment on a definition of conflict as:

"A form of interaction between parties that differ in interests, perceptions or preferences"

P1 To what extent do you agree with this definition?
P2 Would you like to offer an alternative?
(N.B. all subjects subsequently worked with this definition)

Questions for managers:

Q1. What kinds of conflict do you experience at work?

P1 Which are the most significant?
(or are they all of equal importance?)
P2 What makes them the most significant?
(or why are they of equal importance?)

Q2. In your experience, what are the main causes of conflict at work?

P1 Could you say why these issues give rise to conflict?
P2 Which of these do you regard as the most significant and why?

Q3. In what ways do you manage conflict at work?

P1 Talk me through a conflict that you've dealt with
P2 Why did you take this approach?

Q4. Choose two contrasting conflicts. Talk me through how you think they differ.

P1 What was similar about your approach to each?
P2 What was different about your approach to each?

Q5. In your view, what are the effects of your approach towards conflict on you and your staff?

P1 Considering these, is there anything you'd change?
P2 If yes, could you give me an example?
P3 If no, why?

APPENDIX 2

Details of Vignettes for Study 2 – Interviews with managers

Instructions for managers:
Please read the scenarios below:

HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO - INDIVIDUAL

You are the manager of a small team. Recently, you have had some disagreements with a colleague who is of the same status as you in the company. Although there have been some heated discussions, your impression is that the issues have been resolved. Unexpectedly, your boss gives you two hours notice to attend a meeting with this colleague, who has apparently made a complaint about your work performance.

HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO – GROUP

You are the manager of a small team. Although work relationships and group performance have been good in the past, productivity has deteriorated of late. A colleague has told you in confidence that there is a problem about work responsibilities but you do not know the extent of the issue. You are under pressure to meet company targets and have just been told by your line manager that productivity must be increased.

In your view (for each scenario):

1. **What are the possible sources of the conflict?**
2. **What would you do and why?**
3. **What would be the likely consequences of your approach?**

APPENDIX 3

The Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Code Definitions

SIC 1989 Categories 0-9

0 Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
1 Energy and Water Supply industries
2 Extraction of minerals and ores other than fuels; manufacture of metals, mineral products and chemicals
3 Metal goods, engineering and vehicle industries
4 Other manufacturing industries
5 Construction
6 Distribution, hotels and catering; repairs
7 Transport and Communication
8 Banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing
9 Public sector and other services

Sunderland, B. and Nelson, R. (1995) NOMIS (National on – Line Manpower Information System) Reference Manual 3 Durham: General Reference

This represents the SIC categories for industry type, size and structure used as a basis for selection of subjects for Study Three.

APPENDIX 4

Manager Profiles for Study 3

In order of Standard Industrial Classification (n=18)

Manager no.	SIC Code	M/F	LEVEL
1	**0**	**F**	**JUNIOR**
2	**1**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
3	**2**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
4	**3**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
5	**4**	**F**	**SENIOR**
6	**5**	**M**	**SENIOR**
7	**6**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
8	**7**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
9	**8**	**F**	**SENIOR**
10	**8**	**M**	**JUNIOR**
11	**8**	**F**	**SENIOR**
12	**8**	**F**	**JUNIOR**
13	**8**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
14	**5**	**M**	**JUNIOR**
15	**5**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
16	**5**	**M**	**MIDDLE**
17	**5**	**M**	**SENIOR**
18	**5**	**F**	**MIDDLE**

APPENDIX 5

Copy of letter sent to subjects for Study 3 (n=18)

Optimising the Transfer of Conflict Handling Skills – Doctoral Study

I am a senior lecturer in the Luton Business School at Luton University, studying for a PhD in the area of conflict handling skills and their benefits to employers.

Are you able to help?

I need to talk with managers about the ways in which they deal with the inevitable conflicts in their workplace and I wonder if you would be so kind as to assist.

You'll find a video of four conflict scenarios enclosed with this letter. It runs for 11 minutes. If you are able to participate in the research, I'd like you to watch the video twice. As you watch, consider how you as a manager would deal with the conflict scenarios as portrayed. It would also be useful if you could reflect upon your general approach to conflict at work. You may find it useful to make brief notes.

After you've watched the video, I'll be in touch to arrange an interview. This should last a maximum of 40 minutes.

If you are able to help, I can guarantee confidentiality; I am not, and do not intend to be, in the conflict handling business myself! The input of experienced managers is an important part of my research and the information I receive will be put to the best of academic uses. You will of course have access to the findings free of charge. This data will be used for the next stage of the work, which will investigate ways of maximising the transfer of conflict handling skills.

Thanks in advance for your time.
Yours Sincerely,

Veronica Burke

APPENDIX 6

Interview Schedule – Study 3

Questions for managers (n=18)

Thinking back to the video you have just seen:

1. **For each clip (1 - 4): Imagine you were called upon to manage each of these situations.**

   What would you do?
   Why would you take that approach?
   Where would your approach originate from? (elaborate if necessary- i.e. from experience, a training course?)

1. **The video extracts you have seen represent different types of conflict i.e. Clip 1 = Inter-organisational, Clip 2 = Inter-group, Clip 3 = Intra-group, Clip 4 = Individual.**

   Can you recall dealing with these types of conflict at work? If so, for each type (1 - 4):

   What did you do?
   Why did you take that approach?
   Where did your approach originate from? (elaborate if necessary)

   If not, In what ways were your experiences different from those represented in the video?
   Could you give me some examples of conflicts you've managed?
   Using these situations:
   What did you do?
   Why did you take that approach
   Where did your approach originate from?

3. **Is there anything similar about your approach to the conflicts in the video and your approach to managing conflict at work?**

   If so, could you identify the similarities?
   If not, Could you explain the differences?

4. **Can you think of any other types of conflict you've experienced which are not covered by the conflict classification we've mentioned? (recap if necessary).**

   If so, could you identify these?
   Could you explain why they are different from the classification?
   Taking all the conflict types we've talked about into consideration, what's the most common in your experience?

5. **Have you ever received training in conflict management?**

   If so, did you find it useful?
   Could you explain why?

   If not, what would you like such training to cover?
   Could you explain why?

APPENDIX 7

Criteria for selection of OMD providers – Study 4

All Providers were selected from The Outdoor Source Book 1995-6.

In addition, each provider must have:

- Worked in OMD for a minimum of two years
- Run OMD as their main line of business
- A minimum of five employees working for them on a regular basis
- A record of regular contracted services to a range of companies

APPENDIX 8

Covering letter sent to OMD providers - Study 4

Optimising the Transfer of Conflict Handling Skills – Doctoral Study

I am a senior lecturer in the Luton Business School at Luton University, studying for a PhD in the area of conflict handling skills and their benefits to employers.

Are you able to help?

I've been lucky enough to establish contacts which, after initial research and analysis, have confirmed that there may indeed be a useful transfer of learned behaviour from training courses in conflict handling and I need to talk to providers of outdoor management development about the following:

- The learning objectives of the training schemes
- Which broad approaches are effective and why
- What categories of participant do well and why?

You'll find a video of four conflict scenarios enclosed with this letter. It runs for 11 minutes. If you are able to participate in the research, I'd like you to watch the video twice. As you watch, consider how the programmes you offer might help managers to deal with the conflict scenarios as portrayed. It would also be useful if you could reflect upon your general approach to transfer of learning from the outdoor environment into work settings. You may find it useful to make brief notes.

After you've watched the video, I'll be in touch to arrange an interview. This should last a maximum of 40 minutes.

If you are able to help, I can guarantee confidentiality; I am not, and do not intend to be, in the conflict handling business myself! The input of experienced providers is an important part of my research and the information I receive will be put to the best of academic uses. You will of course have access to the findings free of charge. This data will be used for the next stage of the work, which will investigate ways of maximising the transfer of conflict handling skills.

Thanks in advance for your time.
Yours Sincerely,

Veronica Burke

APPENDIX 9

Covering letter and Questionnaire for managers who have attended OMD courses

Optimising the transfer of conflict handling skills via outdoor management development courses – doctoral Study

Covering Letter

I am a senior lecturer at the University of Luton Business School, studying for a PhD in the development of conflict handling skills via outdoor management development events.

I've been lucky enough to establish contacts which, after initial research and analysis, have confirmed that there is indeed a useful transfer of learned behaviour from training courses in conflict handling. As part of the final phase of the research, questionnaires are being given to a selected number of managers such as yourself, who have attended outdoor management development programmes.

The questionnaire should only take about 15-20 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers and in many cases it is simply a matter of ticking a box. There are however, a number of opportunities for you to say more about certain issues. Try and answer all the questions if possible, as accurately as you can.

All the information that you provide will be used for research purposes only. The completed questionnaires will be treated with absolute confidentiality and information identifying the respondent will not be disclosed to your organisation under any circumstances. Therefore, you should not worry about how to answer the questions.

Should you require any further information about the project, please contact me at the University. My direct line is 01582 743193. In the meantime, thank you in advance for your co-operation, and for your time.

Veronica Burke

The Development of Conflict Handling Skills via Outdoor Management Development Courses
Questionnaire for Managers

Company .....

Job Title .....

How long have you been a manager? .....
YRS/ Months

Are you Male ☐ Female ☐

At what level do you currently manage? (Please tick one box)

☐ Junior ☐ Middle ☐ Senior

How many people report to you? (Please tick one box)

☐ Under 10 ☐ 11 – 24 ☐ 25 – 50 ☐ Over 50

Are you a budget holder? ☐ Yes ☐ No

SECTION ONE – ABOUT YOUR COURSE

When did you last attend an outdoor management development course? (Please tick one box)

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Over 5 years	Over 4 years and less than 5 years	Over 3 years and less than 4 years	Over 2 years and less than 3 years	Over 1 year and less than 2 years	less than 1 yr

What were the main aims of the course that you last attended?

.....

.....

.....

What were your reasons for attending?

.....

.....

.....

SECTION TWO – ABOUT YOUR COURSE

This section asks you to identify the conflict handling skills that were developed on the course you last attended. Please rate these skills by ticking one box in each category to represent their importance – both to you personally, and as an aspect of the course.

Skills

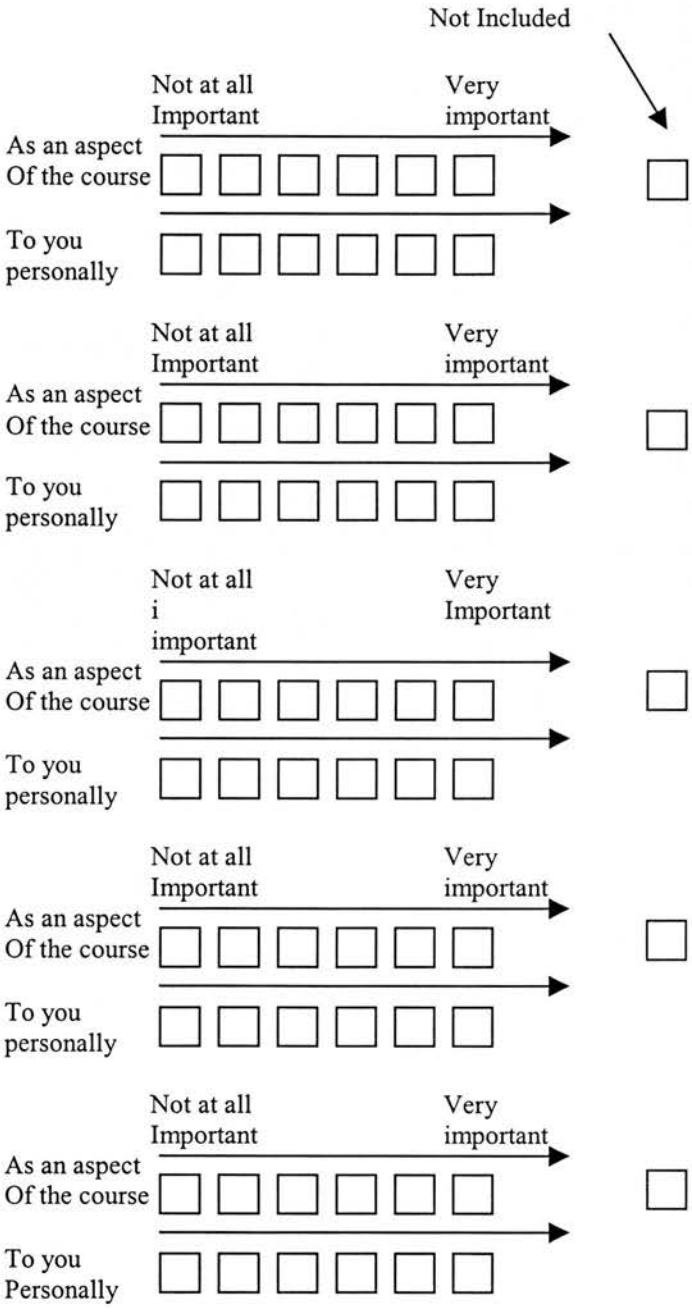
- Process and implement decisions in groups

- Managing Change

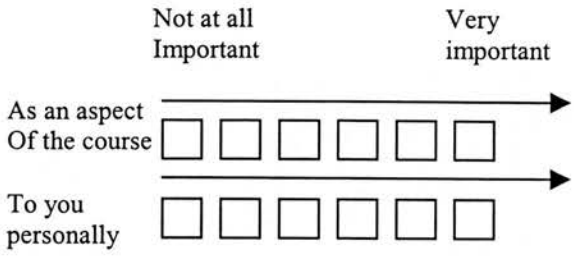
- Dealing with personality differences

- Use of different styles of conflict handling (eg avoidance, collaboration, compromise)

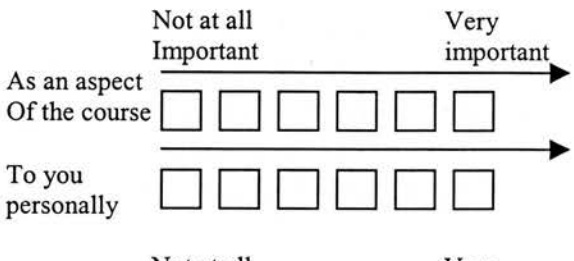
- Listening skills



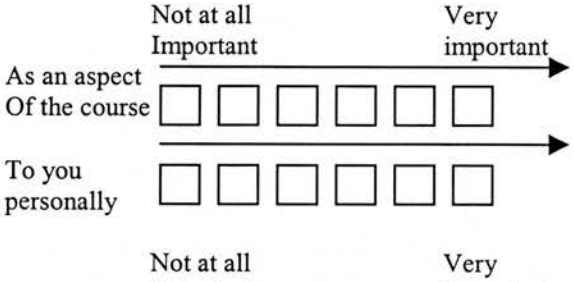
- Dealing with unequal power relationships



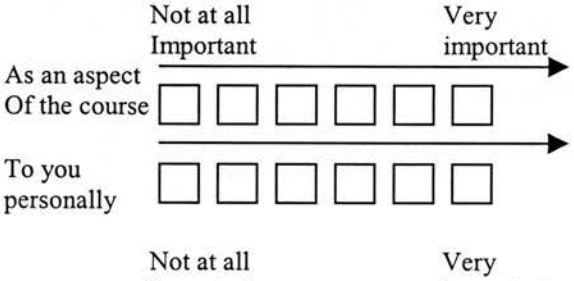
- Resolving conflict as A third party



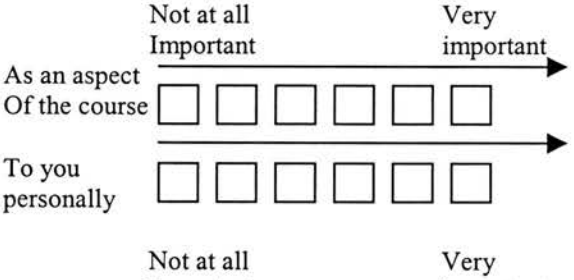
- Negotiation skills



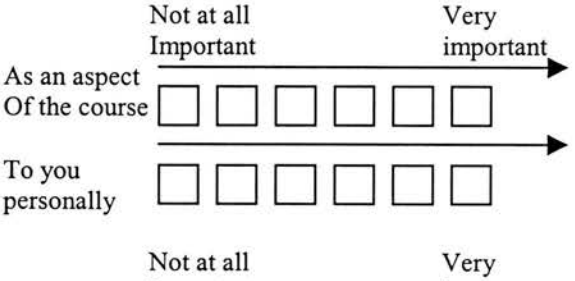
- Assertiveness



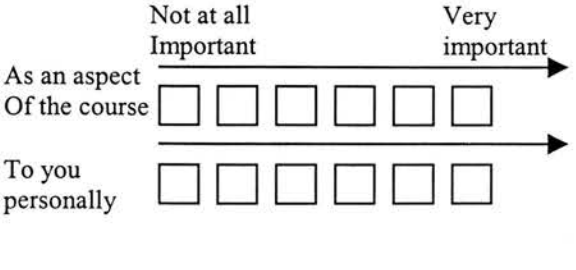
- Use of body language to convey messages



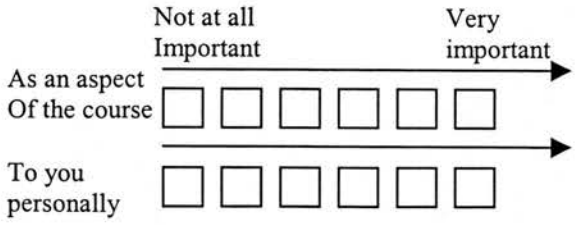
- Being open to others' views in conflict situations



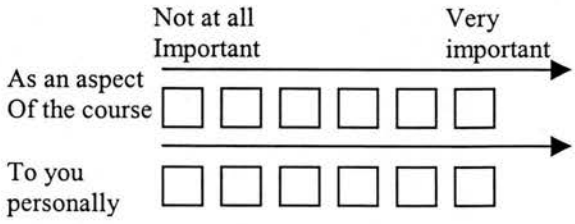
- Using problem solving approaches



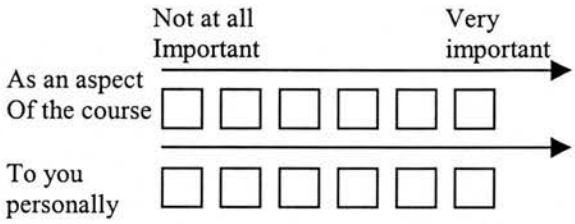
- Anticipating potential conflict



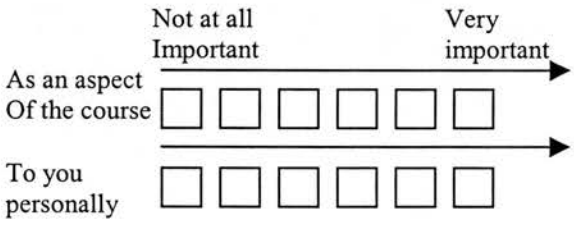
- Modifying initial reactions in order to respond rationally to the conflict



- Using a step-by-step (progressive) approach to resolve conflict



- Changing responses to conflict depending on the situation



Please list any additional conflict handling skills that were developed

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION THREE – KNOWLEDGE

List three ways in which the outdoor course that you last attended extended your knowledge of the conflict handling process.

Please rate each of these answers (1 – 3) by ticking a box to represent how important this knowledge was to you (tick one box for each answer).

1. ..... Not at all Important → Very important
   .....
   .....
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

2. ..... Not at all Important → Very important
   .....
   .....
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. ..... Not at all Important → Very important
   .....
   .....
   ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SECTION FOUR – METHODOLOGY

This section asks about the methods used by the course team to develop conflict handling skills in the programme that you last attended.

List four methods used by the course team to develop conflict handling skills (e.g. were there particular outdoor activities or review processes that prompted learning?).

Please rate each of these answers (1 – 4) by ticking one box in each category to represent their importance – both to you personally, and as an aspect of the course.

1. .....
   .....
   .....
   .....

	Not at all Important → Very important
As an aspect Of the course	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
To you personally	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

2. .....

.....

.....

.....

As an aspect Of the course

To you personally

Not at all Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very important

3. .....

.....

.....

.....

As an aspect Of the course

To you personally

Not at all Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very important

4. .....

.....

.....

.....

As an aspect Of the course

To you personally

Not at all Important ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very important

SECTION FIVE – LEARNING TRANSFER

This section is about the transfer of learning from the outdoor course to the workplace.

List up to three ways in which the course helped you to transfer your learning from the programme into your work setting.

Please rate these approaches by ticking a box to represent how effective they were (tick one box for each answer).

1. .....

.....

.....

Not at all effective ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very effective

2. .....

.....

.....

Not at all effective ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very effective

3. .....

.....

.....

Not at all effective ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very effective

SECTION SIX – ADDITIONAL SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE/ATTRIBUTES

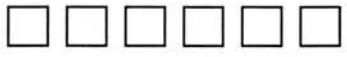
This section concerns any additional skills or knowledge (other than outlined in section two) that you gained as a result of your attendance on the course.

Please list up to three, and rate these by ticking a box to represent how important they were to you.

1. ..... Not at all important → Very important

   .....

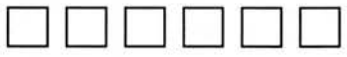
   .....



2. ..... Not at all important → Very important

   .....

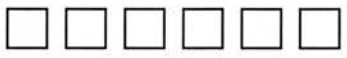
   .....



3. ..... Not at all important → Very important

   .....

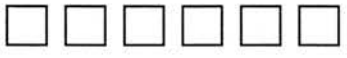
   .....



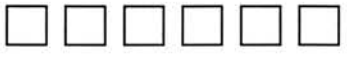
SECTION SEVEN – COURSE DESIGN

Please rate the degree of emphasis (not just the amount of time) allocated to each of the following areas during the course. Tick one box for each answer.

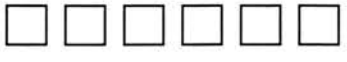
- Conflict handling skills — Not at all emphasised → High degree of emphasis



- Knowledge — Not at all emphasised → High degree of emphasis



- Learning Transfer — Not at all emphasised → High degree of emphasis



Not at all emphasised — High degree of emphasis

- Personal Development ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Thank you for completing this survey. I'm grateful for your help with research and I hope that the results will help us to know more about the conflict handling skills that are acquired on outdoor development programmes.

Veronica Burke

APPENDIX 10

Demographic data for Study 5

Job Title	Frequency
Academy Team Leader	2
Area Business Quality Manager	1
Art Director	1
Business Development Manager	1
Business Unit Director	1
Chief Engineer	1
Customer Services Team Leader	1
Commercial Development Director	1
Editor	1
Head of Group Retail Compliance	1
Head Teacher	3
HR Development Manager	3
HR Director	1
Information Manager	1
Managing Director	1
Operations Director	1
Organisation and Training Manager	1
Product Manager	1
Production Supervisor	1
Project Editor	1
Project Manager	2
Regional Account Manager	1
Regional Director	2
Regional Manager	2
Reliability Manager	1
School Manager	1
Senior Development Actuary	1
Shift Manager	2
Team Leader	2
TOTAL	**39**

Job title; frequency scores n = 39)

Length of Service – YRS	Frequency (no. of respondents)	Percentage
1-5	20	51.2
6-10	9	23.0
11-15	4	10.2
16-20	3	7.9
21-25	1	2.5
Missing	2	5.2
TOTAL	**39**	**100.0**

Length of service; frequency scores and percentage (n = 39)

Gender	Frequency (no. of respondents)	Percentage
Male	22	56.4
Female	17	43.6
TOTAL	**39**	**100.0**

Gender; frequency scores and percentage (n = 39)

Level	Frequency (no. of respondents)	Percentage
Junior	7	17.9
Middle	17	43.6
Senior	15	38.5
TOTAL	**39**	**100.0**

Level of management; frequency scores and percentage (n=39)

Direct Reports	Frequency (no. of respondents)	Percentage
Under 10	20	51.3
11-24	8	20.5
25-50	5	12.8
50+	6	15.4
TOTAL	**39**	**100.0**

Direct reports; frequency scores and percentage (n = 39)

Budget holder?	Frequency (no. of respondents)	Percentage
Yes	32	82.1
No	6	15.4
Missing	1	2.6
TOTAL	**39**	**100.0**

Budget holding responsibility; frequency scores and percentage (n = 39)

Last attendance	Frequency (no. of respondents)	Percentage
Less than 1 year	14	35.9
Over 1 and less than 2	12	30.8
Over 2 and less than 3	6	15.4
Over 3 and less than 4	2	5.1
Over 5	4	10.3
Missing	1	2.6
TOTAL	**39**	**100.0**

Previous attendance at an OMD course; frequency scores and percentage (n = 39)

APPENDIX 11

Publications and Conference papers arising from the Research

PUBLICATIONS:

Burke, V. and Collins, D. (2000) Dealing with work conflict: Issues, approaches and implications for sport managers European Journal for Sport Management 7, 2, Dec., 44-64

Burke, V. & Collins, D. (2000) Outdoor Management Development: A new framework for analysing learning outcomes in Dahiya, S.B. (Ed.) The Current State of Business Disciplines Vol.5 Management II pp. 2459-2474 ISBN 81-7600-054-X

Burke, V. & Collins, D. (2000) Dealing with Work Conflict: The Managers' Challenge in Dahiya, S.B. (Ed.) The Current State of Business Disciplines Vol.5 Management II pp. 2235-2250 ISBN 81-7600-054-X

Burke, V. & Collins, D. (1998) The Great Outdoors and Management Development: A framework for analysing the learning and transfer of management skills Managing Leisure - An International Journal 3, 3, July, 136-148.

Burke, V. & Collins, D. (1996) Physical Challenge and the development of conflict management skills; in How Teams Work in Sport and Exercise Psychology (Edited by H. Steinberg and J. Annett) p.49-56 Leicester: British Psychological Society.

CONFERENCE PAPERS:

July 2001 Using the outdoors to promote the learning of managerial skills: Analysing the process of learning transfer Leisure Studies Association National Conference, University of Luton

June 2001 Learning to Learn: Using the outdoors to promote the learning and transfer of management skills 2nd Annual Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Luton

July 2000 Analysing Student's Perceptions of Transferable Skills via Undergraduate Degree Programmes 1st Annual Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Luton

Sep. 1999 Dealing with Work Conflict: Issues, Approaches and Implications for Sport Management 7th European Congress for Sport Management, Thessaloniki Greece.

October 1998 Managing Change and Changing Managers: Using the outdoors to improve the quality of sport management 6th European Congress for Sport Management, Madeira, Portugal.

October 1996 Physical Challenge and the Development of Competent Conflict Managers in Sport and Leisure Organisations 4th European Congress / First International Sport Management Alliance Conference, Montpellier University, France.

April 1996 Physical Challenge and the Development of Conflict Management Skills British Psychological Society, Sport and Exercise Section, Brighton.

May 1995 Conflict in Sport - To Manage or Not to Manage? That is the Question International Conference on Philosophical Issues in Sport and Physical Education Cardiff Institute Of Higher Education.

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